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END OF AN
ANCIENT MARINER

A Crime Club Detective Story

IT is said that dead men tell no tales, but sometimes sudden death is the means of bringing well-hidden tales to light. It is so in this story ; for out of the seemingly accidental death of the unknown old man who called on Philip Blakeway at Hampstead comes the clearing-up of an old crime. How Captain John Jay really died, how Ann Burton set out to look for her missing father, and how Superintendent Wilson unravelled the tangle, you will read in this book, in which you will find not only a detective story in Mr. and Mrs. Cole's best manner, but also another example of their habit of writing about people who behave like real men and women, and not merely figures whom the author moves about at his pleasure.



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DEATH OF A MILLIONAIRE

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DEAD MAN'S WATCH

CORPSE IN CANONICALS

POISON IN THE GARDEN SUBURB

MAN FROM THE RIVER

MURDER AT CROME HOUSE

THE BROOKLYN MURDERS

END OF AN ANCIENT MARINER

G. D. H. & M. COLE

Nº 54



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CHAPTER I

PHILIP BLAKEWAY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

PHILIP BLAKEWAY stood before his open front door, beside the long black Packard, with its impassive chauffeur, that was to convey his wife and stepdaughter away to their country place near Lambourn. Helen Blakeway, slim and graceful despite her forty-two years, leaned out of the window of the car to kiss him, and say a parting word.

"You're sure you'll be quite all right, angel?"

"Of course. Hatch will look after me. It's only for the night, darling. I'll be down by tea-time to-morrow."

"And you'll make sure Gregory brings the rest of his clothes. Mrs. Hatch knows. I've taken all the heavy things."

"Yes, darling. Everything will be quite all right."

"But do you think you will really get down to tea? You'll have to wait for Gregory, you know. It will take him a little time to get ready after he arrives."

"Oh, if we're late, we'll get tea somewhere on the way. Expect us when you see us—to dinner, in any case. That'll be best. But I expect it will be for tea. Gregory won't take long."

"You will try to make friends with him, won't you? It matters such a lot to me that you two should get on together. No, angel"—she put a hand on his shoulder—"I know it hasn't been your fault. But do try again."

Philip Blakeway leant forward and kissed his wife lightly on the tip of the nose. "Don't be a silly ass-child," he said. "Of course Gregory and I are going to be real friends from now on. Good-bye, love. It's high time you were off. See you to-morrow. Good-bye, Sheila."

Sheila Trefusis, leaning back luxuriously on the far side of the car, took no notice. But her mother kissed Philip yet again before settling back in her seat.

Philip waved a hand. "All right, Markham," he said to the chauffeur. "Fire away now." With a soft purr, the black Packard began to glide away down the drive. Philip, with his hands in his pockets, stood whistling a tune as he watched until it vanished round the curve. Then he called out to a dim figure outlined inside the front door. "All right, Hatch. Shut the door, I'm going for a stroll." The door closed silently behind him; and Philip, still whistling, sauntered away slowly down the drive and out into the road.

It was a lovely afternoon in mid July, and Hampstead Heath was looking its best. Philip's big house, sheltered from the road by a belt of low trees and bushes, faced the West Heath; and Philip often preferred the open Heath to his own pleasant garden for a hatless afternoon stroll. He looked, despite the heat, very cool and comfortable as he came out of his front gate and slowly crossed the road. Gaining the Heath, he turned to look back on his domain, and sighed contentedly. Sun House was really an exceptionally pleasant place, and Hilda an exceptionally satisfying wife; for was it not to her that he owed his good fortune? The country place to which he was going to-morrow was pleasanter still, and Philip loved the country better than the town. Truly, he was in luck's way—rich, happily married, in good health, and conscious of his own charm and of an abounding capacity for making friends. Philip sighed again. What more could a man want? Nothing, if it would only last. For it had not been always so in Philip Blakeway's forty-seven years of life. He had seen trouble, though he was ten years off looking his age.

Philip's luck, when it came, had come with a rush. Only a year ago he had been an unsuccessful exporter

in a small way, doing a dwindling business chiefly with Brazil and the Argentine, and in daily fear of bankruptcy. Then, week-ending with Bob Semple at Low Clere, he had met Hilda Trefusis ; and that had been that. Trefusis, the highly successful architect who had built Sun House for his own occupation, had then been dead for nearly a year, and Hilda, who was an old friend of Bob's, was still in very becoming mourning. Her two children, Sheila and Gregory, had been away at boarding school ; and he had fancied her lonely and consolable, though every one at the Semples' seemed to be fluttering round her all the time. Naturally ; for Hilda Trefusis was not only a matrimonial catch on the grand scale, but also by far the most attractive woman in the party. Philip had cut her out, promptly, decisively and triumphantly, under a dozen pairs of eyes. Considering their ages, the affair had been absurdly swift and also romantic—at any rate on Hilda's side. A fortnight after their first meeting, they were married at a Registry Office by special licence ; and Sheila and Gregory were told nothing about it till it was all over. They had not liked it at all ; and when they came back for the holidays to meet the new master of Sun House, all Philip's blandishments—and he was charming to them—had failed to break down their solid dislike. It was so still—the only fly in the ointment of Philip Blakeway's content. Sheila pointedly ignored him ; and Gregory, when he got the chance, was apt to be positively rude.

When Philip was married, his wife wanted him to give up his absurd little business, and live a life of complete leisure on her money. She would have settled as much as he liked on him absolutely ; but the lawyers told her that was impossible, because of some wretched trust her husband had made. An abundant income was hers for life ; and each of the children would get a nice little fortune on coming of age. But the capital was not

hers to touch. It went to the children on her death. Still, as she and Philip had no intention of adding to the family, that did not matter. Why should he keep on going to his silly office when there was no need? But on this point, as on most, Philip was as obstinate as he was suave. He had no hesitation in taking his wife's money to pull his business out of its present difficulties; and he saw his way to making quite a reasonable success of it once the old debts were out of the way. He meant to go on with it—and he did go on, despite all that Hilda could say. He became, indeed, much less regular in his attendance at the office; and there was never any difficulty in getting away for as long as he liked. His partner, Sam Fowler, could and did see to everything in his absence.

Philip had two reasons for refusing to give up his work. One was that the new fortune really did seem to him too good to last, and that, as a practical person, he realised that it depended utterly on his wife's survival and their continuing together; and the other, and even more powerful, reason was Sam Fowler. For he and Sam had been through a good many things together, and were the closest of friends as well as partners; and no power on earth could have brought Philip to the point of leaving Sam in the lurch now that his luck had turned. Even if he could now do without the income his restored business could be relied on to bring in, Sam could not; and Philip meant above all else to give Sam Fowler a square deal. His thoughts flashed away now from Hilda and Sun House and his own prosperity to Sam Fowler, as he stood looking across the road at the masterpiece of the late Gregory Trefusis. Thanks to him, Sam was all right now; for the business had safely turned the corner. It came into his mind that, although he liked his wife well enough, he would unhesitatingly have burned her at the stake if Sam Fowler's interests had demanded the sacrifice. For

these two were the joint possessors of a friendship, rare among men, that had stood without strain the test of eventful years. Good old Sam ! How Sam had rejoiced in Philip's luck, though it meant that they could not live together any more. He must find, among Hilda's numerous friends, some one who would suit Sam Fowler—some one as rich and personable as Hilda herself, or at any rate reasonably rich, as well as personable. But would Sam look at her, however rich and charming she might be ? Sam, unlike Philip, was not the marrying sort. One woman, he had often said, had looked to him much like another, ever since his one disappointment ; and he didn't like the look, at any rate from the matrimonial point of view.

Well, even if Sam didn't marry, the business was all right now ; and Sam's tastes, unlike Philip's, were simple and inexpensive. A couple of rooms, always untidy ; the chance of a game of cricket on Saturdays—or golf in the winter ; and a quiet rubber or so and a reasonable allowance of drink in the evening—and Philip's friendship. Those were enough for Sam ; and, given them, he was perfectly content to sit in his office all the rest of the week. Sam was getting fat, this last year, and his contentment was far greater than Philip's own. For Philip could not help worrying at times ; but Sam seemed to have put all his old worries clean out of his mind.

Philip ceased to stand still, sunning himself in idle contemplation of his own domain, and strolled slowly away among the trees, in the direction of Jack Straw's Castle.

It was late afternoon, and a lovely day ; and the Heath was fairly full of people. Philip, however, had a way of falling into a deep fit of abstraction when he walked, and he was almost oblivious of his surroundings just now, at any rate in his conscious mind. He climbed up the steep steps to the Castle, came out of his abstraction a moment to look right over London,

and see the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral glimmering in the distance in the sun, and then, turning slowly, went past the pond with its flotilla of sail of various colours, and was brought suddenly to a full and alert consciousness of himself by the sound of a loud and raucous voice uplifted in exhortation.

A little ahead of him, on the pitch beside the railings of the reservoir, a small crowd was gathered. Above it, raised presumably on a box or chair, rose the owner of the voice, waving his arms about and roaring lustily at his audience. He was calling upon sinners to repent while there was yet time. Behind him waved a shabby crimson banner embroidered with a reference to the wrath to come. But one sight of the speaker, after the sound of his bellowing, was enough for Philip. He turned on his heel, and walked rapidly away by the road he had come. His one desire was speedily to put as much space as he could between himself and the owner of that raucous voice.

The sound of it followed him into the distance as he made for home. Thank the Lord, the old man had not seen him. That would have been the very devil. His mere presence in London, when Philip had supposed him safe on the other side of the Atlantic, was bad enough. He was puzzled too; for from his knowledge of Captain John Jay, of the merchant service—and it was considerable—he would assuredly never have expected to find him addressing a revivalist meeting.

As Philip Blakeway strode back across the West Heath, at a pace most unlike the leisurely saunter of a few minutes before, all his tranquil enjoyment was gone. For from that moment, with Jay in London, and possibly living in Hampstead, he could never know a minute's peace. But what could he do? To persuade Hilda to leave Sun House was utterly out of the question, even if the old reprobate was living somewhere near. For Sun House belonged to Hilda, who was proud of it;

and on no account must she know of his trouble. He could only live, every day, in suspense, and hope that Jay would not find him. He might, no doubt, seek the old man out, and try to buy him off. But that, his common sense told him, was far too risky a venture. For, if Jay had really turned over a new leaf and become a revivalist in his old age, he might be above taking a bribe ; and, if he was the same drunken old hypocrite as ever, there was one thing of which Philip was quite certain. That thing was that Captain Jay would never keep his tongue still when he was in his cups ; and, given any money, he was pretty certain to be in his cups continuously until it was spent. There had been a time when Captain Jay was merely a heavy drinker, who took his liquor like a man. But even in Philip's memory he had reached a stage of being more often drunk than sober, at any rate ashore. It was, in fact, being dead drunk in a hurricane that had lost him his ship, and caused his involuntary retirement from the sea. But that had happened after Philip had lost touch with him. Even if Jay was destined to find him, there was likely to be a reprieve ; for he was going down to Lambourn the following day, and the old man was not at all likely to discover him there. He would have, on his holiday, time to think out what he had better do, or to school himself to living under the constant anxiety which doing nothing was bound henceforth to involve. To the accompaniment of these unpleasing reflections Philip Blakeway regained his own house, and flung himself into a chair in his handsome library to pursue them further, to no better profit.

"Come in," he cried, half an hour or so later, in response to a knock at the door. Hatch entered. "There's a man asking to see you, sir," he said, with manifest disapproval in his voice.

"What sort of a man ?" Philip asked, an unnatural fear clutching already at his heart.

"A seafaring man, I should suppose, sir. The person is elderly, sir, and stout-built, with a white beard. He says you will know him, but refuses to give his name. At least . . . " Hatch paused.

"At least, what?" Philip asked, with a chill at his heart. For he knew now that already Jay had found him out.

"The person did not give your name, sir. He asked for the . . . er . . . gentleman who came into this house a few minutes ago."

Philip smiled, despite his feeling of being stunned by the calamity. "Did he say 'gentleman,' Hatch?"

"No, sir. 'Gentleman' was my own emendation."

"I see," said Philip. "Well, Hatch, I suppose I'd better see the fellow and find out what he wants. Show him into the morning-room, and we'll leave him to cool his heels for a bit. If he asks any questions, don't answer them."

"Very good, sir," said Hatch.

"Oh, and I say. When you've done that, bring the whisky and soda in here—and two glasses."

"Very good, sir."

"Oh, and you'd better bring the rum as well. You know, that special overproof stuff Mr. Semple gave me."

"Anything further, sir?"

"No, that'll be all. Bring the drinks as soon as you've disposed of the ancient mariner. In the morning-room."

"Very good, sir," said Hatch again. He went out, shutting the door softly behind him.

Philip's thoughts were racing. Old Jay must have seen him after all, despite his hasty withdrawal. That seemed to be the only possible explanation of his visit. For, if he had been on his way to interview Philip before their chance encounter, he would hardly have stopped en route to address a revivalist meeting. But how had

the man managed to follow him home? He had been in the full blast of his eloquence when Philip turned and fled. That must surely mean that he had caught sight of Philip, brought his oration to a close, and set off at once in pursuit. He must have been only a few paces behind, in order to see where Philip had gone to earth. And now—what to do? Was there no way of escape? Philip had thoughts of dashing out of the house the back way, leaving Hatch to get rid of the unwelcome visitor. But that would never do, because Jay would be bound to talk to Hatch, and if Hatch got to know . . . So that was ruled out. He thought of simply refusing to see the man, but that wouldn't do either. There was no help for it. He must see Jay and have it out. But before he saw Jay he must have a plan. Philip's thoughts went racing again.

Before Hatch came back with the drinks, there was at least one thing clear in Philip's mind. He must get Hatch—and Mrs. Hatch—out of the house as soon as possible. There was no other servant, because the rest had gone down to Lambourn earlier in the day to get the other house ready for his wife. If he could get rid of the Hatches he would have the place to himself—and he had no desire that any one else should be within earshot of that raucous and penetrating voice when he and Jay settled down to their forthcoming discussion.

It would be none too easy to persuade Hatch and his wife to go out, with Sam Fowler coming to supper, and George Rhodes and Major Sayers due to arrive afterwards for a game of bridge. But the supper was cold and already laid; he had seen it in the dining-room as he passed. Putting out the drinks for the evening would take only a few minutes, even if he could not persuade Hatch to leave that to him. Of course, the man was bound to think it very strange, being packed off like that at a moment's notice. But that could not be helped. Even beggars could not be choosers; and

as for men who found themselves in Philip's position . . . They had to take risks. Hatch came back, bringing the rum and whisky on a tray. "Oh, by the way, Hatch," Philip did his best to make his tone light and natural, "I've arranged with Mr. Fowler that we'll look after ourselves to-night. No waiting, I mean. I want you to leave everything ready in the dining-room. And, as I shan't be needing you, and you and Mrs. Hatch won't be able to leave the house unguarded while we're away, I should like you to have an evening off to-night. Go down and get dinner at a decent place in town, and then go on to a theatre. It'll be all right if you are back by about midnight. Get off at once, as soon as you've put things ready in the dining-room. That oughtn't to take five minutes, ought it? I'll see about the drinks for the evening, so you can get off in decent time."

Philip got all this out without a pause, uncomfortably aware of Hatch's eyes never once looking at him while he was speaking. His butler's absolute impassivity had never made him half so uncomfortable as now.

"Of course, it shall be as you wish, sir. But I think Mrs. Hatch would prefer to remain and ensure that everything is in order."

"Nonsense, Hatch. You and your wife don't get out and enjoy yourselves half enough. A dinner and a theatre will do you both good." Philip fumbled with his note-case. "Here, this ought to see you through." He extracted three pounds, feeling that he must be liberal, but not so liberal as to seem to be tendering a bribe.

Hatch took the money. "Very good, sir. How soon would you wish us to go? I shall have to tell Mrs. Hatch, and it will take her a little time to get ready."

"The sooner the better," said Philip, looking at his watch. It was a quarter past six. "You want to have plenty of time for dinner before the show."

"Would half an hour's time be soon enough, sir?"

"Soon as you can," said Philip, not venturing to press too hard.

"As you wish, sir," said Hatch. "Would you desire me to show the person in here now?"

"No," said Philip, "I'll fetch him in when I'm ready. There's something I must do first. Hold on a minute." He sat down at his writing-table, and scribbled a line, put it into an envelope and stuck it down. "Just give him that, will you, to keep him quiet in the meantime. If he asks, I've got some one with me, and can't get free for a few minutes. But don't answer any other questions."

"I understand, sir," said Hatch. ("The deuce you do!" thought Philip) "I will deal with the person."

"Then off you go and leave me to it. I've got to telephone."

As soon as Hatch had gone, Philip rang up Sam Fowler's number. Sam had a flat near Victoria Station. But there was no answer. Philip banged down the receiver with a curse, after hanging on long after he had lost real hope. For that meant that he had to face Captain John Jay alone. Fowler was not due till a quarter to eight, and he was usually behind time.

CHAPTER II

SUDDEN DEATH

THE late Gregory Trefusis had been more proud of his dining-room at Sun House than of any other room he had ever designed. Everything about it was light, and the orange colour of the walls made the place blaze with light on a sunny day. In the middle of the big room stood a long oak table, almost white, with handsome oak arm-chairs arranged around it. Two of the chairs were pushed back, and the table still bore the remains of supper for two.

But there was a second table in the room—a smaller table, of the same almost white oak, standing in the half-circle of a rounded window, fitted with comfortably cushioned seats. Round this table four men were seated, talking; two of them on the window seats and the others in arm-chairs facing the window. On the table stood a decanter, flanked with packs of cards and scoring-blocks; and each man had before him one of those curiously-shaped bell glasses from which the knowing savour, as well as sip, liqueur cognac that is worthy of being savoured. They had not yet begun to play, though the cards were on the table. For the moment the talk, and Philip Blakeway's Napoleon brandy, demanded all their attention.

Philip Blakeway was on the window-seat, so that his face was in the shadow. But, though he was doing most of the talking, and doing it very well, so as to hold the attention of at any rate two of his listeners, any one who had studied him closely, knowing him well, would have seen that he was at strain. His muscles were held taut, and there was an expectancy about the poise of his body and the lines of his face, as if he were listening, or waiting for something to happen. Next to him, also on the window-seat, was a man who looked—and was—above all else good-humoured, easy-going, and harmlessly self-indulgent. You would have taken him for some years Blakeway's senior, though they were as a matter of fact of the same age. This man was palpably nervous, though neither of the two men opposite appeared to have noticed anything unusual in his manner. He kept looking across at Philip with an expression in which dog-like affection and anxiety were strangely blended; and all the time he fidgeted, shifting his legs about, playing with his glass or the cards, and laughing rather too boisterously at Philip's sallies. This was Sam Fowler, Philip Blakeway's business partner and closest friend.

The two men opposite, in the arm-chairs, were a curious contrast both to each other and to the two in the window-seat. One—George Rhodes—was a big man, dark-haired, with a bushy dark moustache and a heavy jowl. He had a successful and rather self-important air about him, and when he spoke it was as if he were used to people taking notice of what he said. He was in fact a successful merchant banker, a partner in a business house that is a name to conjure with all over the world ; and, when he wrote a letter to *The Times* on financial matters, he could be sure of the place of honour on the middle page, even if he had nothing of any importance to say.

The fourth man, Major Benet Sayers, was small and thin—even scraggy, with a complexion of a dead yellow and a skin scarred and pitted with the marks of exposure and disease. By profession he had been a mining engineer, and much of his life had been spent prospecting in strange places, from China to Mexico and the remote interior of Peru. He spoke but little, but when he did it was in a high-pitched voice, almost a falsetto, and always to the point. His eyes were extraordinarily quick and observant, and Philip, who had got to know him well, considered that he had ten times George Rhodes's brains. Of his courage and tenacity no one who knew his record could have a moment's doubt. Incidentally, his title of "Major" came from the Great War, and he was a V.C.

Philip Blakeway was talking—for the moment—about golf, for which George Rhodes was an enthusiast. He had just been reading a new illustrated book about it, which Rhodes had not yet seen, and he was trying to demonstrate a new grip which the author, one of the younger school of American professionals, was recommending. He endeavoured to show the correct position of the fingers, and then rose suddenly to his feet. "Look here," he said, "I'd better get the book. It's in my

dressing-room, I'm almost sure. Won't take me a minute." He drained his brandy, and set the glass down. "Shall we cut for partners before I go?" he said. "Then some one can be dealing."

They cut—Philip and Rhodes against Fowler and Sayers. Fowler was to deal. He picked up the cards and put them before Rhodes for cutting as Philip walked away. Then he began to deal, so clumsily that the cards got muddled, and had to be shuffled and cut again. He dealt the second time, while Rhodes held forth about some financial matter which appeared to excite him—something about the gold standard that provoked Sayers to brief and sardonic comment. Fowler finished dealing, poured himself out a fresh brandy and committed sacrilege by draining it at a draught. Rhodes answered Sayers hotly; for the comment had outraged his most cherished conviction. Fowler, having drunk his brandy, sat all braced up, like a man expecting some momentous event. The financial discussion continued.

At length Sam Fowler rose to his feet. "Philip's the hell of a time," he said. "I think I'll go and see what's become of him."

Rhodes, in the thick of a complicated exposition, paid no heed, but the keen eyes of Major Sayers followed Sam as he hurried across the room. "A bit jumpy," he said to himself. "I wonder why?" Rhodes boomed on.

Sam Fowler had not been gone a minute when there came, muffled but not far off, the sound of a sharp report. Sayers was on his feet in an instant, cutting off George Rhodes's eloquence in mid-sentence. "That sounded to me like a shot," he said, and made promptly for the door. George Rhodes, slower of mind and movement, and still intent on his interrupted exposition, rose more ponderously from his chair and followed.

Major Sayers met Sam Fowler running down the

stairs. He was all of a dither. "Philip's found a burglar," he panted, "and he's been shot."

The Major did not pause to inquire which had been shot. He pushed Fowler aside and ran swiftly up the remaining stairs. Behind him he heard Fowler repeating his news to George Rhodes.

The long corridor above was but dimly lighted, but along it in the distance Major Sayers could see a figure bending over something that lay upon the floor. He ran towards the group and found Philip Blakeway on his knees beside an old man's prostrate body. He seemed to have opened the shirt and to be feeling for the heart. "I think he's dead," Philip said, in the tone of a man half-dazed and frightened. "I can't feel his heart beating."

"Let me," said Sayers, pushing Philip aside. He in his turn knelt beside the old man, who exuded, unmistakably, a strong aroma of rum. A very brief examination was enough. "Yes, he's quite dead." Sayers rose to his feet. "We mustn't move him any more. You'd better ring up the police. What happened?"

Rhodes had come up, accompanied by Fowler. "Let me have a look at him," said Rhodes importantly.

"Don't touch him," said Sayers sharply. "The police will want to have everything undisturbed." He turned to Philip. "I asked you what happened."

"I was in the corridor," said Philip, breathing heavily. "You know, I came up here to get that book." He pointed to a volume, lying open face downwards on the floor not far from the body. "I couldn't find it at first—had quite a hunt. Then I did find it, and, as I was coming back along the corridor, he came out of this door. It's my wife's room. I asked him what the devil he was doing, and he whipped out a revolver and pointed it at me. I saw my chance, and flung the book at him, and then went for him. We had a tussle. I was

trying to get the revolver out of his hand. Then it went off, suddenly, and he crumpled up—just before Sam came running along the corridor. He lay quite still, as if he was dead, and I sent Sam to fetch you fellows, while I had a look at him. I suppose he must have been after my wife's jewel-case. But it's not there, of course. She's taken it down into the country. Well, I suppose I'd better go and ring up the police." He turned away.

"Stop a minute," said Sayers sharply. "Ever seen the fellow before?"

Philip did not look down at the body. "Never," he said. "He's quite unknown to me."

Sayers grunted. "Reeks of rum," he said. "Sane men keep sober when they go burgling." He grunted again. "Don't look like a burglar, either. More a seafaring type, I should say. No kit with him." He bent again over the dead man. "Shot clean through the brain, I should say. Bullet entered just below the eye. Revolver still in his hand. Wonder he didn't drop it. But all that's a matter for the police. Go and 'phone 'em, Blakeway. I'll stand guard till they come."

"I'll 'phone, old man," said Fowler. "You've had a bit of a turn, I know. Go and mix yourself a good stiff drink, while I see to things. That'll put you right." He took Philip's arm in his and led him away protectingly towards the stairs. Sayers and Rhodes were left beside the body.

"Rotten luck on Blakeway," said George Rhodes. "It's bound to mean a lot of unpleasantness with the police for him, though of course it's no fault of his the revolver went off. Serves the fellow right, whoever he is. There have been too many burglaries up in these parts lately. My opinion is that a burglar who carries firearms deserves all he can possibly get. It's a nuisance for me, too. I was off on holiday in a couple of days, and now I suppose they'll want me to give evidence at the

inquest. Why the devil did the man want to go and get himself shot here?" Rhodes was talking for the sake of talking, to calm his nerves. He blathered on. Sayers stood, with his wrinkled face even more puckered than usual, staring down at the body with a puzzled look. He was not listening to Rhodes.

"I'm sure I've seen this chap," he said suddenly. "Somewhere, a longish time ago. But I can't place him. I wonder who he is. Not a regular burglar, or I'll eat my hat. They've got too much sense to get drunk when they're on a job. Besides, he don't look the part."

"My dear fellow," said Rhodes, "surely you don't expect a burglar to look like a burglar, do you? He wouldn't stand half a chance if he did. If ever I take to burgling, I shall try to look like a churchwarden."

Sayers paid no attention. He was staring down at the body, as if he was fascinated by it. "Queer," he muttered. "It's all queer. I wish I could remember where I saw that chap. And . . . that isn't the only thing about it that's queer." He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it's all no business of mine, I'm glad to say. What were you saying, Rhodes?"

"I was wondering if the fellow knew there were no servants in the house," Rhodes answered. "If he did, that looks like inside information. You remember, Blakeway apologised for the servants being out."

"Aye," said Sayers. "And that's queer too. It's a damned queer business altogether."

CHAPTER III

ENTER THE POLICE

WITHIN a few minutes of the telephone call to the police station from Sun House, Inspector Whittall, accompanied by a sergeant and a constable, was on his way to the scene of the fatality. Over the telephone, he had

learnt only that a burglar had been found in the house, had threatened the owner with a revolver, and had been shot dead with his own weapon in the ensuing scuffle. Whittall stayed only to ring up the police surgeon, Dr. Gamble, and ask him to come to Sun House at once, before setting out himself with his satellites.

The door was opened to him by Sam Fowler, who had spoken to him over the 'phone. Philip Blakeway, looking badly shaken, came into the hall and greeted the inspector, and the entire party went upstairs at once. Sayers and Rhodes were still standing in the corridor beside the body. Philip introduced them to the inspector, who requested them all to stand back while he had a look at the dead man.

"Dead enough," he commented. "Shot through the eye. Death would have been instantaneous, I imagine. But that's a matter for the doctor. Has anything been moved? How did it happen?"

Philip answered. "We were wrestling when his gun went off, and he went limp and fell down like that when I let go. I handled him a bit when I was looking to see what had happened, but I hardly moved him at all, I think. Practically, he's lying just as he fell."

"No one else moved him since?" asked Whittall.

Sayers answered. "I just touched him to make sure he was dead, but I don't think I disturbed the body at all."

"Same here," said Fowler.

"I haven't even touched him," Rhodes added.

"So I can take it he's just as he fell, can I?" said the inspector. "He smells of drink, by the way. Does that mean he's been at your drink supply, Mr. Blakeway?"

"I don't think so. Of course, there is drink in the house, and he may have got at it. But it seems unlikely. We should have heard him if he had been about downstairs."

"We'll look into that later," said the inspector. "Meanwhile, we won't touch the body till the doctor comes. But I'll just have a look round here." He saw the open book lying on the floor. "What's that book doing there?"

Philip explained. "I had gone upstairs to fetch it—to show to Mr. Rhodes. I was holding it when he pointed his pistol at me, so I flung it at him and then closed."

The inspector grunted. Then, producing a pocket torch, he went on his hands and knees and crawled about, carefully studying the floor for some distance round the body. If he made any discoveries, he offered no comment, and he put nothing away in pill-box or envelope after the manner of the best detectives of fiction. As he rose to his feet, there was a knock at the door. "That'll be Dr. Gamble, I expect," he said. He turned to the constable who had been standing in the background. "You go and let him in, Coote. Sergeant, you just have a look in all the rooms along the corridor, and see what the fellow had been up to. You'd better go with Sergeant Day, Mr. Blakeway. You'll be able to tell if anything's been upset. But there's no sign of his having any swag with him—unless it's in his pockets, and I don't want to touch those till the doctor's been."

At this moment the constable returned, accompanied by a small, brisk man with a squint. "You've been quick, doctor," said the inspector. "Here's your man. Have a look at him, will you? The folks here say he's not been moved."

Dr. Gamble in his turn bent over the dead man. "How'd it happen?" he asked. In Philip's absence the inspector repeated what he had been told. "That seem all right to you, doctor?"

Dr. Gamble said, "Hold on. Let me have a proper look at him first." With the aid of a lens he carefully studied the wound, and then turned his attention to



the hand in which the revolver was still clasped. Bending closer, he then sniffed at the dead man's mouth, pulled back the eyelids and gazed at the eyes through his lens, and then opened the mouth wider and peered inside. These things done, he rose to his feet, and straightened himself.

"The shot killed him at once," he said. "It went in just below the eye and entered the brain. He'd not have moved at all after he fell. The man had been drinking heavily not long before he died; and I should say, by the general look of him, he was a confirmed drunkard. Of course, I can go into all that more closely at the mortuary if you wish. But it may not be relevant. That's all, I think, as far as I'm concerned."

"How long would you say he'd been dead, doctor?" Whittall inquired.

"Can't say to a few minutes, but not long. Say half an hour, more or less. Probably less rather than more. You don't often get to 'em so promptly in these cases."

"At the outside, then, not more than half an hour?" asked the inspector. "How would that fit in, gentlemen?"

"I wasn't taking much account of time, I'm afraid," said Fowler. "But I should have thought that it was a bit longer. It seems so to me."

Major Sayers intervened. "It is precisely thirty-one minutes since we heard the shot," he said.

"So that fits in," Whittall commented. "Well, doctor, I don't think we need keep you. We'll have the body round at the mortuary for you, as soon as I've had time to get a look at his pockets, in case you want it."

"I'll come round in the morning and look him over again. But I shan't be able to tell you any more than I've told you now. There's really nothing more for me to do. It's a perfectly clear case, as far as I can see.

Well, good-evening, gentlemen. See you later, Whittall, about the formalities. I'll let myself out."

"Stop a minute, doctor," said Major Sayers, in his high, squeaky voice. "There is a point I should like to put to you before you go."

Dr. Gamble turned back impatiently, "Well, what is it?" he said.

"It's this. You noticed the way the pistol is held in the dead man's hand?"

"Of course, I did," Gamble barked. "What about it?"

"It doesn't look right to me," Sayers persisted. "I've seen a good many deaths by shooting in my time, and in my experience, when a man is shot like that, the weapon drops out of his hand. It isn't clasped, as it appears to be in this case."

"Hm. Think you know a lot, don't you?" retorted the doctor, irritably. "You can't generalise in these cases. Might have dropped the weapon, or might not. In this instance, it wasn't dropped. Nothing in that. That all you wanted to say? If so, I'll be off." He pulled out his watch, and made a cluck of impatience.

"I don't agree with you," said Sayers. "I maintain the weapon must have dropped. And, if so, some one put it back. What do you think, inspector?"

Sam Fowler broke in. "Really, this is abominable, Sayers, I assure you no one touched the revolver. I didn't, and Philip didn't either, because I was on the spot just as it happened, and I saw the thing in the man's hand just as it is now. As if either of us . . . it's absolute nonsense. And it's an abominable insinuation."

"I'm not insinuating anything," said Sayers, "only I have some knowledge, and the point struck me as important, and I feel it my duty——"

"To make an ass of yourself," said Sam, hotly.

"Shut up, Sam," said Philip. "Now that the matter has been raised by Major Sayers, I should wish to be

quite clear about the doctor's opinion. Of course, the body is just as it fell—neither I nor any one else has touched the revolver. But, to ease Sayers' mind, I hope Dr. Gamble will look again."

"Interfering busybody," said Dr. Gamble, glaring at Major Sayers. But he bent once again over, and studied the position of the revolver in the dead man's hand. "Just as I said. Perfectly natural," he reported. "He was grasping it tightly as he fell, and his hand stiffened on it. That satisfy you, Whittall?"

"Perfectly," said the inspector. "The gentleman has been letting his imagination run away with him."

"Then, at last, I am off," said the doctor. "Used to having my time wasted over mares' nests. But I won't have people teaching me my job." He hurried off; for he had been interrupted in the middle of a private musical party, and he was eager to get back, the violin, rather than surgery, being his real passion in life.

Philip and the sergeant came back. "Some one's been turning drawers upside down in the lady of the house's bedroom, sir," he reported. "But the gentleman doesn't think there's anything been took."

"Taken, sergeant," said the inspector. "Looks as if you interrupted him right at the start, Mr. Blakeway. I'll have a look at his pockets now. If he's taken anything, we may find it there. At all events, he's probably got something on him that'll tell me who he is."

Whittall again went down on his knees beside the body and began to go carefully through the pockets. But he found little enough to reward him—a very dirty old briar pipe, badly burnt down on one side, some shag tobacco wrapped up in a dirty scrap of cotton cloth, a box of matches, the stub of a pencil, a large clasp knife of a common type, an old watch of American manufacture—of a type so common as to be useless for following up—several bits of string neatly rolled up, a few shillings and some odd coppers, a large bandanna

handkerchief, which bore neither name nor laundry mark, a dishevelled cigar, found loose in a pocket, and an evening paper folded up. That was the entire bag—not a letter or paper of any sort to reveal the dead man's identity, no pocket-book or note-case, and no tools for housebreaking, or spoils taken by the man before his meeting with Philip Blakeway. In fact, from the standpoint of the inspector, nothing that was likely to be of any use at all. He said as much, as he began hunting the dead man's clothes for any sign of a name sewn in a pocket, or even of initials marked on an undergarment. There was none—not even a tailor's name on the shabby reefer coat.

"All the same," said Whittall, "I expect we'll be able to find out who he was. Looks as if he deliberately left behind anything that could be used to identify him. Some men do, when they go out on a job. . . . Well, I think that's all I can do up here for the present, though I'll come back and have a look round the rooms later on myself. Sergeant, you 'phone up the station for the ambulance, and get him taken away. Day, you mount guard here till they come. And now, gentlemen, shall we go downstairs? I shall have to interview each of you and ask you a few questions, as a matter of form. I suppose there's a room I can have for that?"

"Better use the library," Philip suggested.

"Then if you'll come along with me, sir, and the other gentlemen 'll wait handy, we can soon get it all over."

They trooped downstairs, and Philip led Whittall into the library, while the other three went to wait in the dining-room together.

"Now, sir," the inspector began, "I shall want a full statement from you. Just tell me the story in your own words, slow enough for me to get the gist of it down for my report."

Philip began to tell how he had left the other three together in the dining-room and gone upstairs to fetch a book he wanted to show them. He had been some time finding it, for it had fallen under the bed close to the wall. As he came out of his dressing-room carrying it, the dead man emerged from his wife's room farther along the corridor. He called to him, asking him what he was doing there, and ran towards the man, who thereupon threatened him with a revolver. He replied by flinging the book in his face, as he had described already, and closing with his antagonist before he could fire. In the scuffle that followed, the pistol went off, and the man simply collapsed, as he had said. At that moment Fowler came up, and together they looked at the body and made sure the man was dead. Fowler hurried downstairs to fetch the others, and they all had another look together, before Fowler rang up the police. Then he and Fowler stayed downstairs till the inspector's arrival, while Sayers and Rhodes remained with the body.

"That's all clear and straightforward, sir," said the inspector, when he had got the gist of it down in his note-book. "I understand the dead man is a complete stranger to you. Is that so? Never set eyes on him, till you saw him coming out of the lady's room?"

"No, I wouldn't say that," said Philip. "He was a complete stranger until about six o'clock this evening, when, as my man will tell you, he called on me here."

The inspector pricked up his ears. "That's news, sir," he said. "My sergeant is looking round now, to try to discover how he effected his entry. But it may alter matters, if he has been here ever since six. You say your man will tell me. I understood from Mr. Fowler there were no servants in the house to-day, as it was being shut up and you were looking after yourselves."

Philip explained. "My man, Hatch, and his wife were both here when this fellow called this afternoon.

Hatch let him in. But I sent them both out for the evening, as they will not be able to get out together while I'm away. I don't allow the house to be left empty. They went about half-past six, and I let the man out myself by the front door soon after that. So I can assure you he has not been here all the time. He must have got in again later—how, I haven't any idea. But probably your sergeant will soon find out."

"We can leave that for the moment, sir. Now about this earlier visit. You say you had never seen the man before."

"No, I don't say that, inspector. All I say is that I have no recollection of ever having seen him. He claimed to have met me before in Brazil. I lived out there for some time as a merchant."

"I see, sir. And what was the purpose of his visit?"

Philip made a gesture. "What do you suppose, inspector? He wanted to borrow money. I didn't lend him any, I may say."

"At any rate, sir, that means you know his name."

Philip looked nonplussed. "But I'm afraid I don't," he said. "He did mention it, I believe, but it conveyed absolutely nothing to me. I told him I'd never heard of him, and had no recollection of ever having seen him before. In fact, I think he must have been mistaking me for some one else. It was something like James, or Jones, or possibly Mayne—only I'm fairly sure it wasn't Jones. I'm really very sorry to have forgotten, but it didn't seem a matter of the smallest importance."

The inspector nodded slowly. "What excuse did he make, sir, when he asked you for money?"

"The usual tale, inspector. Said he was down on his luck, and he was certain I should remember him, and be ready to help him out."

"And how did he take it when you refused, sir?"

"Badly; he was half-drunk, and he tried to bluster. So I promptly booted him out. As a matter of fact,

I took him by the shoulders and ran him out of the front door."

"That was after the servants had gone, sir?"

"Yes."

"And it looks as if he promptly sneaked in again the back way, and hid somewhere about the house till he thought the coast was clear. We shall have to look into that, sir. He has probably left traces."

"I don't see it much matters," Philip observed. "We know he did get in, and what happened to him afterwards."

"Matter of routine, sir," said the inspector. "We like to get our cases nice and tidy, even when they are all plain sailing, as this seems to be. Well, I think that'll be all from you, sir. Will you send Mr. Fowler in next?"

There was little of interest in Whittall's examination of Sam Fowler. What there was turned on the actual moment of his arrival on the scene of the affray. Sam, now perfectly self-possessed, explained that, as Philip had been away so much longer than they expected, he had got up and gone to look for him. Being a close friend, he knew his way about the house well, and he had appeared at the top of the stairs just in time to see the dead man, who was a complete stranger to him, menacing Philip with a revolver. He had seen Philip throw the book at his assailant, and then close with him, and the revolver had gone off just as he rushed to his friend's help. The whole thing had been over in a moment. Sam's story thus confirmed completely Philip Blakeway's account of the affair.

George Rhodes, who came next, had nothing of importance to add, but added it importantly, as beffited his position. That his examination took some time was due to him, and not to the inspector, who had had a long day, and was eager to get away.

Finally, Major Sayers was called in. Inspector Whit-

tall hoped against hope that the Major would not raise again his speculations about the dead man's grip on the revolver; for he entirely accepted Dr. Gamble's view of that matter. So he began with merely routine questions, with the idea of getting rid of Major Sayers as soon as he could. These questions produced answers which merely confirmed what Whittall knew already. But Sayers was not prepared to be promptly dismissed when the inspector had done with him. He proceeded to volunteer numerous observations of his own. He was certain, as he had said earlier to George Rhodes, that he had seen the dead man somewhere before—a long while ago—though he was unfortunately unable to place him. Yes, it might have been in Brazil, if there was reason to believe the man came from there. Yes, he had known Blakeway when he was living in Rio de Janeiro as a merchant. But he did not connect his meeting with the dead man with Philip. It was just an unplaced recollection of the fellow's appearance. But one or two other points had struck him. Possibly nothing in them, but he felt he ought to get them off his chest. First, the smell of rum. The inspector had noticed that, he knew. Then the man's appearance had struck him as that of a seafarer, and there was an unmistakable stain of tar on one of his hands, and others on his clothes. That ought to help in identifying him, if there was any difficulty. The man hadn't looked to him like a regular burglar. And he hoped, finally, that despite Dr. Gamble's view, the inspector had taken notice of what he had said about the curious way in which the dead man's hand was holding the revolver. He still felt, in spite of the doctor's opinion, that he must be right, though he was very reluctant to raise the point, and did so only out of a strong sense of duty. It wasn't easy to tell about a thing like that, he agreed. But he had had a lot of experience of violent death—in the war; and, apart from the revolver, the way the body

was lying on the floor hadn't looked to him quite natural either, unless it had been moved before he arrived. But of course that couldn't be, after what Blakeway had said. He might add that the choice of that evening to break into the house, when there were no servants, looked like inside information. But doubtless the inspector had thought of all these points for himself. Oh, no, he wasn't casting doubts on what Blakeway said. Merely mentioning certain points that had occurred to him, as he felt it his duty to do.

At last Inspector Whittall got rid of Major Sayers. "The matter with that chap," he confided to the sergeant later on, "is that he's been reading too many of these damned detective stories." Which was not true, for, in fact, Major Sayers had never read a detective story in his life.

It remained to see the sergeant and find out if he had discovered how the burglar had got in, and then to make his own promised tour of inspection upstairs. The former presented no difficulties. The sergeant had found a ground floor window at the back of the house wide open, with clear signs of having been forced from the outside with a chisel or jemmy, or some similar implement. The inspector accompanied his subordinate to look at the damage, and made further entries in his note-book on the spot. Then they proceeded upstairs, glanced at the rumpled drawers in Hilda Blakeway's bedroom, found no signs of any of the other rooms having been disturbed, and were on the point of giving up the quest when it occurred to the inspector to pull open the door of a cupboard at the extreme end of the corridor. It was a linen-closet, and on being opened it exhaled a stale smell, in which the inspector thought he could detect distinctly the odour of rum. Further study showed particles of sand and clay soil on the floor, and dirty marks as if something heavy had been leaning up against the sheets on some of the shelves.

"This is where he hid after he got into the house," said the inspector, making further entries in his little book. "I'll wager he came back at once after Mr. Blakeway kicked him out, and hid here till he thought the coast was clear. Well, thank the Lord we're done now. I'll tell the world I'm about all in. Nothing else, is there, sergeant?"

"Only an empty rum bottle lying on top of the dust-bin, sir. And that may have no connection."

"Better bring it along, though. I like to be thorough, even in a damn fool case like this."

With which reflection Inspector Whittall said farewell to Philip and returned to the police station to make his report. He would have, for form's sake, to come back to-morrow and see the man, Hatch, but that could wait. The inspector was quite ready to call it a day.

CHAPTER IV

THE END?

THE inquest on the body of Captain John Jay was held in due course, but the coroner and his jury sat upon the body of an unknown man. For, despite a week's adjournment to allow of further inquiries by the police, Jay's identity was not established. He was buried at the public expense, in a pauper's grave, and, despite the publication, in most of the newspapers, of a picture taken after death but carefully touched up to remove the disfigurement caused by the wound, no one came forward to throw any light on the dead man's antecedents or place of residence.

Something, indeed, was found out about him. While his body was lying in the mortuary, the local police were bidden to go and look at it, in case any of them knew the man by sight, and a young constable thereupon announced that he had seen him once, when he

had been on duty at a meeting by the Whitestone Pond, on the afternoon which preceded his death. The old man had been addressing a meeting held under the auspices of the Holy Army, but the constable had never seen him there before, though he had been on duty on the fringe of many of the Army's meetings.

This information sent the police in quest of the local officers of the Holy Army ; and the Army's local organiser, Lieutenant Blare, on being shown the dead man's photograph, at once agreed that he had addressed the meeting for a few minutes on the afternoon in question. He could, however, give no further information ; for it was the Army's practice to encourage those whom the spirit moved to come up on their platform and testify on the spot, and it appeared that the dead man had simply responded to an invitation of this sort from the chairman of the meeting. The organiser had, indeed, been somewhat glad to see the last of him ; for though his eloquence had been considerable, and there had been no reason to doubt his sincere penitence, his language had been rather lurid, and he had smelt of drink to an extent calculated to give the Holy Army's platform a bad name. As to who he was, where he had come from, or what he had been doing in Hampstead that day, the Holy Army's organiser professed complete ignorance. The dead man had waxed eloquent about his own sinful past ; but, as often occurs in these cases, his reminiscences had not been of the kind that included accurate references to time or place. He had mentioned South America, as a particularly sinful part of the world, about which horrible tales could be told. Of that the weedy little organiser was certain, but that seemed to be the only place he had mentioned.

It did, however, link up with what Blakeway and Major Sayers had said, and Inspector Whittall felt sure that the dead man had come from South America—probably quite recently—on a ship, which had sailed

back without him, and without notifying his disappearance, when he did not return in time. There was nothing very extraordinary in such a thing happening ; for seamen, the inspector felt, were apt to be casual people, and it had probably been assumed that the dead man had deserted his ship of his own free will.

It was rather more extraordinary that no letters or papers of any kind had been found in the dead man's pockets ; for seafaring men—and the Holy Army's organiser had at least confirmed the impression that the man had been a seafarer—were as a rule exceedingly careful about their papers. That, however, might only mean that the dead man had been so careful as not to carry them with him when he was engaged in a nefarious enterprise. It was also a curious point that neither the handkerchief nor any of the dead man's garments bore any names. But they had evidently, from their appearance, all been bought ready-made across the counter, some of them probably in America, from the cut of the clothes. The watch, was we have seen, was a cheap American affair, but that of course proved nothing ; and the revolver was also American, and of a common pattern, so that it would have been hopeless to attempt to trace it, even if it had seemed to be worth while to go to so much trouble.

The medical evidence at the inquest added only one thing to what we have heard already. At some time before his death, the deceased had got a bruise on the back of the head. There was no question of the bruise having done any serious damage. In view of the fact that the man had obviously been drinking, it seemed most likely that he had fallen down, and hit his head up against something hard. The appearance of the bruise, which had only broken the skin in one place, was fully consistent with such a cause. In response to the coroner—No, Dr. Gamble could not say how heavily the deceased had been drinking, as there had seemed

to be no cause of making a special examination of the organs with the object of clearing up that particular point. He had, however, smelt strongly of rum, even after death, and from his appearance Dr. Gamble would have put him down as a habitual drunkard.

Philip Blakeway and Sam Fowler, in their evidence, merely repeated what they had told Inspector Whittall at an earlier stage, and were not seriously cross-questioned. George Rhodes, who was out of England on important business, was not called, as it appeared that his evidence could add nothing to what was known from other sources. Major Sayers, who was called, brought up again his point about the unnatural way in which the dead man had been holding the revolver, but Dr. Gamble, recalled on this issue, roundly declared that in his view it was all nonsense. The way the revolver had been held had been perfectly natural, allowing for the convulsive shifting of the grip at the moment of death, and the position of the wound was entirely consistent both with this and with its having been accidentally inflicted in the course of a scuffle for possession of the weapon. The manservant, Hatch, also gave evidence about the dead man's visit in the course of the afternoon, but his impassive testimony shed no additional light.

The verdict was, in these circumstances, a foregone conclusion. The jury expressed the view that the deceased had met his death by accident, adding that in their opinion he had brought it on himself by going around trying to murder people, and this verdict the coroner duly accepted and recorded, when he had been at pains to rephrase it in less inelegant language.

So the body of Captain John Jay was ingloriously buried away from men's sight, and no one seemed to regret his passing. Philip Blakeway, who had been compelled to remain in town till after the opening session of the inquest, was able to get away when it

was adjourned, only coming up again to attend the second session after the week's delay which was granted in the hope of identifying the deceased. Meanwhile his young stepson, Gregory Trefusis, who had arrived at Sun House on the morning after the fatality, had been packed off promptly to Lambourn in a hired car.

An interview with Gregory was one of the two unpleasantnesses which Philip Blakeway had to suffer. Naturally the boy, arriving in the midst of the excitements about the affair, of which he had seen a brief report in the morning paper, had been all curiosity. But his old antagonism to Philip seemed to be quite as strong as ever, and it was to Sam Fowler, who had stayed the night with his friend, and to Hatch that the boy resorted for information. For Sam, unlike Philip, got on excellently with young Gregory, as he did with all boys of Gregory's very normal British public school type. Sam readily told the boy all about the affair, but Gregory's attitude dismayed him, especially after the boy had had a talk with Hatch. For though Gregory, being well trained in manners, would not have dreamed of telling what he thought to Sam, who was Philip's closest friend, the boy was transparent enough for Sam to get a pretty clear idea of what was in his mind. It was at any rate obvious that Gregory was suspicious, and not disposed to accept Philip's account of the affair at its face value. Hatch seemed to have said something that had roused his suspicions, and his very intentness on assuring Sam that he entirely believed Sam's own version of what he had seen only served to throw into relief his scepticism about Philip's account of the accident.

Sam did not quite know what to do. He did his best by backing up Philip's version, and suggesting that any other view of the affair was merely absurd; but he had to do this without discussing the thing directly, and above all without so insisting that there was nothing

wrong as to cause Gregory's suspicions to take deeper root. Sam told Philip he was worried about the boy's attitude, but Philip only laughed.

When, however, Gregory had to go into the library to say good-bye to Philip before starting for Lambourn, there was an unpleasant little passage of words. Philip wished the boy a pleasant journey and asked him to tell his mother not to worry, as the whole affair, though unpleasant, was luckily plain sailing, and was not likely to keep him hanging about in town for long. Gregory promptly answered with a rudeness which startled Philip, that he meant to tell his mother what he felt he ought to tell her, and not what any one else wanted him to tell.

Philip shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, tell her whatever you like, Gregory," he said. "It doesn't matter to me what you tell her."

"I know what Hatch thinks," said Gregory pointedly. "And I'm not sure he isn't right."

"Hatch had better mind his own business," Philip answered. "And suppose you mind yours, and don't keep the car waiting." They parted on that unsatisfactory note.

But when Gregory did get to Lambourn he said as little as he could to Hilda, for he found her all of a dither, and far too full of Philip's providential escape—for he had been talking to her over the telephone—to be ready to listen to anything of the sort he had in mind. Gregory could only impart his suspicions to his sister, who was never averse to listening to anything that made against her stepfather.

"Look here," he said, "I feel damned sure there's more in this than meets the eye. It's admitted this old bloke came to see *him*" (both Gregory and Sheila had a way of speaking of Philip as "him," with an unpleasant intonation of voice) "—came to see *him* in the afternoon. But after that, who ever set eyes on the

fellow? Nobody, as far as I can make out. *He* got Hatch and Mrs. Hatch out of the house in a pretty fishy way, Hatch thinks. So as to have the coast clear. Of course, Hatch wouldn't *say* he thought it was fishy, but I could jolly well see he did think it was. After that, *he* had the old chap to himself. It's all very well for *him* to say he let him out, or booted him out rather, and he must have sneaked back afterwards. I just don't believe it. I don't believe he ever went out of the house. I believe *he* hid him upstairs for some jolly fishy reason. Then, later on, he went up to see how the chap was getting on, and they had a rumpus about something, and the chap pulled out his gun at him, and they had a scrap and the old chap got shot. No, I'm not saying *he* murdered the fellow on purpose. I dare say it was an accident, and the chap did get shot with his own gun, same as he says. But I'm blest if I believe him when he says he doesn't know who the chap is. Why, Hatch is sure he knew. Hatch says he could see *he* knew when he described the chap, and *he* wrote him a note Hatch took to him in the morning-room, where he'd been told to wait. *He* wouldn't have written a note to a chap he didn't know, would *he*? I rather think, by the way, Hatch read the note, but of course he wouldn't let on about that. And where is the note, I'd like to know, and so would Hatch. It wasn't found in the chap's pockets, Hatch says; and it wasn't lying around in the morning-room either. I tell you, if I were a policeman, there's a jolly lot more I should want to know about the whole thing. I wouldn't believe what *he* says, so easy as that copper seems to have done."

With which distressing and unfilial reflections Sheila Trefusis said she cordially agreed; for Sheila was not likely to be behind Gregory in thinking evil of her step-father.

But we must go back to Hampstead; for this account

of what Gregory said to Sheila has come in out of the proper order of events.

Philip's other interview, earlier in the day, before Gregory fired his parting shot, was even more unsatisfactory. It was with Hatch, who, after breakfast, asked his employer for a few minutes' private conversation. Hatch, of course, had been given an account of what had happened by Philip on the previous evening, when he and Mrs. Hatch got back from the theatre. The butler had then offered no comment, beyond saying that it was very unfortunate, after all, that he and Mrs. Hatch had gone out, because the burglar would probably never have broken in if they had been in the house. There had been, Philip fancied, a nasty inquisitive look in his eye while he was listening to the story of the evening's events. That had not surprised Philip, for he had realised that the circumstances under which Hatch and his wife had been hastily removed from the scene of operations the night before had been calculated to arouse thought, and Philip was well aware that Hatch was no fool. Moreover, it was impossible to be quite sure what Jay had said to Hatch that afternoon, or whether Hatch had gleaned anything from it about the old man's past relations with his employer.

The request from Hatch for an interview did not therefore take Philip by surprise, but he could hardly be expected to look forward to it with pleasure. For it was a ticklish job to know what line to take ; and there was quite a possibility that Hatch had gathered enough to make things awkward for him if he liked. The interview had to be granted ; indeed it was indispensable from Philip's point of view to find out whether Hatch did know anything or not. It took place in the library.

" Well, Hatch, what is it ? " Philip asked, doing his best to appear at ease.

" It is about this unfortunate affair last night, sir. I understand the Inspector of Police has intimated his

intention of coming to see me, and ask me what I know. I thought it only right to see you first, sir, about it."

"All I can say, Hatch, is that of course you must give the inspector any help you can. I don't see how you can help him much. You can only tell him the man called here yesterday afternoon, refused to give his name, and was shown into the morning-room to wait till I had time to see what he wanted. What he did want, as I suspected all along, was money. He had some story of having met me in South America, but I haven't the smallest recollection of ever having seen him before. But, of course, the inspector won't want to ask you about all that—you've only to say you showed him in, and he refused to give his name."

"And about your sending him a note, sir."

"Oh, that," said Philip lightly. "As a matter of fact I should never have sent a note if I hadn't thought I knew who the fellow was. What I mean is that I distinctly thought from your description he might be some one else I used to know. That's why I wrote the note. Only he turned out to be some one I didn't know at all. By all means mention the note if you think it will help. But I don't think it is relevant. It doesn't matter, anyway."

"I am glad to know that, sir," said Hatch. "The old gentleman seemed very sure you would know him. 'Tell the blighter what I look like,' he said, begging your pardon, sir, for the expression. 'He'll know who I am fast enough.'"

"It seems clear that he mistook me for some one else—just as I mistook your description of him for some one else. In any event, I didn't know the man, so that's that."

Hatch suddenly changed his tack. "Mrs. Hatch and I, sir, feel that we ought to thank you again for the very pleasant evening we had—especially as it turned out so very unfortunate, our being out."

"Oh, that's all right, Hatch," said Philip lightly. "I'm only glad you enjoyed yourselves better than I did."

"I suppose, sir, you would wish me to tell the inspector when precisely you arranged for Mrs. Hatch and me to go out?"

Philip tried to look astonished. "Really, Hatch, it's not my business what you tell the inspector. I presume you will answer any questions he asks you, and tell him anything you think it important and suitable to tell."

"If that is what you wish, sir. I have no desire, sir, to volunteer information unless it appears to be desirable."

"Then don't fuss, man," said Philip. "It's a perfectly straightforward case, and what you say can't affect it one way or the other."

"Doubtless, sir. But the gentleman seemed so positive you would know him. And if I may say so, sir, it seemed so much as if you did know him, when I described him to you. And then, sir, your sending me and Mrs. Hatch out so suddenly. I only thought it might seem strange to the inspector if I mentioned it."

"Look here, Hatch," Philip exploded, "what the devil are you hinting at? I don't understand you at all. Are you suggesting I knew the man, when I've told you I didn't? Because, if so, though I value your services, you'd better go. If you're not, then we'll say no more about it. Got that?"

Hatch remained unshakable in his deferential impassivity of manner. "Of course, sir," he said, "I was not hinting at anything. But I wished to know what line you desired me to take. I had thought, sir, for some time, of suggesting that you or madam might see fit to increase my remuneration. But perhaps, as I was with madam before you came, sir, you would sooner I spoke to her about that."

"If you say another word, Hatch, I shall pay you a month's wages and fire you out without a character. As for my wife . . ."

"As it was madam who engaged me, sir, I should prefer to take my dismissal from her. But, if I may say so, sir, it would look bad if it were known at the inquest that I had been dismissed. It would not be fair to either of us, sir."

That was the devil of it, Philip thought. It would look bad. He simply could not afford to dismiss Hatch just then, even apart from the fact that Hilda, who valued Mrs. Hatch very highly, would certainly inquire very earnestly into the reason why. But, if he could not afford to dismiss Hatch, still less could he afford to be intimidated by him. Philip steered a careful course between the two dangerous extremes. He was well aware that the man who once gives in to blackmail is usually lost.

"I think this business must have got on your nerves, Hatch," he said. "Suppose we say no more about it. And, as to what you say to the inspector, that's your business, and you must please yourself. I certainly can't advise you."

"Very good, sir," said Hatch. "I will consider the position and act as I think best." With this cryptic remark, Hatch withdrew his forces in good order from the field.

After that, no wonder Philip was nervous, for he had no idea what Hatch would or would not say to the inspector, and at the inquest when the time came. But it appeared that Hatch said nothing, or at any rate as little as he could, to Inspector Whittall, and certainly his evidence at the inquest was utterly colourless. It did not even appear that the arrangement for him and his wife to go out for the evening had been made at the last moment, when the stranger was already in the house; and, whatever Jay had let drop

to Hatch, no hint of it appeared in his evidence. Hatch played up so perfectly that Philip had to resist a strong impulse to raise his wages after all. That, he told himself, would be definitely dangerous, at least until after a reasonable interval. So he did nothing, and refrained even from speaking to Hatch about his behaviour at the inquest, or from making any further reference at all to the affair.

So Captain John Jay slept in his pauper's grave. The papers relating to the case were filed away at the police station and forgotten, and to all seeming the entire episode was at an end. Philip, away at Lambourn, living a pleasant life of ease apart from his strained relations with his stepchildren, devoutly hoped it was ended once and for all. Gregory, indeed, scowled at his stepfather even more than of old, but it did not appear to Philip that he had carried out his threat of telling his mother his suspicions. Philip felt that he probably had told them to his sister, for Sheila Trefusis also seemed to dislike him more than ever, and could barely be brought even to notice his existence. It was therefore in some respects an uncomfortable holiday, but there were plenty of guests in the house, and for the most part Philip did not find it unduly difficult to keep out of his stepchildren's way. With Hilda he was as charming as usual, and her love for him was immense and reassuring—the stronger for his providential escape from being shot. Nor did he find her caresses unpleasing, for he liked Hilda quite a lot, though it was not in his nature to return her love.

CHAPTER V

MISSING—A FATHER

MRS. BURTON's hired Ford drew up outside the front gate of the little creeper-covered house facing upon the village green of Bathease. She had wired ahead to announce her coming, and at the sound of the taxi the front door opened and a slight, middle-aged woman came hurrying down the garden path. It was a sweet-smelling garden of many colours, obviously tended by loving hands, and the alert little woman who hurried past it to the gate to greet her visitor went well with its scented tranquillity.

"Here you are at last, my dear. I got your wire. I do hope you've not had too trying a journey."

"Not a bit," said the visitor. "I'm as well as can be. How's father?"

"I'm sure I don't know, my dear. He's not been here for some time, though his things are here. I was expecting you would know where he was."

"Not here?" echoed the other. "But I wrote to him to tell him I was coming."

"Yes, dear, and your letter's still here waiting for him, unopened. I knew your writing, but I had no address to send it on to."

"It's very extraordinary," said Mrs. Burton. "I made sure he'd be here. He can't have meant to go off without telling you where he would be. You don't think anything can have happened to him?" Her voice was anxious.

"I thought he might possibly be with that Captain Pollen he sometimes goes off with. So, when I got your letter saying you were coming over, I wrote to him at that address. But there's been no answer, so I suppose he isn't with him."

An expression of distaste passed over Ann Burton's face at the mention of Captain Pollen's name. "I've heard of Captain Pollen," she said, "though I have never seen him. There's no one else father ever stays with, is there?"

"Not that I know of, dear. The only times he's been away before he's always said he was going with Captain Pollen."

"I do dislike what I've heard of that man," said Ann. "I'm certain he's bad for father. How was he before he went away?"

The bright-faced little woman shook her head. "Not too good, my dear," she said. "I tried my best, but sometimes nothing would keep him off it, especially when he had been having one of his religious turns. They were always bad for him, and I'm afraid he's been worse lately."

"I know," said Ann. "That's what makes me so worried. I'm sure something has happened to him, or he would have been sure to have let me know where he was."

"Don't you worry, dear," said the other. "However, it's sheer wicked waste to stand here talking, with the taxi ticking up threepences all the while. Tell the man to get your things inside, dear, and send him away, and then I'll get you some nice tea and we can have a good talk."

Mrs. Burton's luggage was carried up to the little house, and the taxi was duly sent away. The visitor went into quite adequate raptures about the gayness of the garden, and the cool, flower-scented charm of the low whitewashed room in which she was to sleep. By the time she had taken off her travelling things, and washed, the "nice tea" was ready; and a very nice tea it was, with all manner of country scones and delicious home-made jam. Mrs. Markham, bustling around, could not do too much for her, and but for her

anxiety about her father she would have been in a mood for unalloyed pleasure. For, like most Canadians, Ann Burton had a deep, sentimental affection for the old country, and this was the "Old Country" as she had imagined it—and something more. It was her first visit to England.

"How's Bob getting on?" she asked Mrs. Markham, whom she knew to be wrapped up in her only son—the very image of his dead father, as she always declared.

"He's so lucky," said the other. "Bob's got such a good job, and part of the time he's quite near. Only twenty miles off, at Lambourn. He's chauffeur to such a nice lady—a Mrs. Blakeway she is now, but she used to be Mrs. Trefusis. They have a lovely house at Lambourn, and another up in London Bob says is grander still. Bob always did love cars, you know."

"I know," said Ann. "I'm so glad he's such a credit to you. I wonder if I shall see him while I'm here?"

"He's sure to come over," said Mrs. Markham proudly. "He never neglects his mother. But it's a long time since I saw him, because the family have been away in London. They are back at Lambourn now, but Bob hasn't had a chance to get over yet. He will, when he can. Bob's a good boy."

"He always was," Ann smiled back. "It will be nice to see him again, now he's a man. I still think of him as about that high. But you don't look a day older."

Mrs. Markham smiled her satisfaction. "So they all tell me," she said. "It's the garden keeps me young. I'm always up and about, you know. And I do quite well with tea for visitors. You see, Bathease is quite a show village. There's something about the church and the old houses that people come from all over the world to look at. Americans, and all—though there haven't been so many of them lately. And it's good for trade, dear, so I don't grumble, though if it wasn't for that,

I think the village would be nicer without the charabancs."

"How long is it since father went away?" Ann asked.

"All of three weeks, my dear. No, let me see, it must be more than that. Three and a half weeks, more like. And not a word from him all that time. But I've kept his room ready for him all the same. And how's that dear boy of yours? You'll be thinking ill of me for not having asked after him before."

Ann laughed. "He's not much of a boy any longer," she said. "He's very much Mr. Thomas now. He's been at college in Canada three years. And now he's got a scholarship to Oxford. That's why I came over, really, to be near him while he takes his course. I'm as proud of him as you are of your Bob, you know."

"I'm sure you are, my dear, and quite right too. But only to think of him being grown right up. It doesn't seem natural. And I'm sure you don't look as if you ought to have a grown-up son. Where is he now, if I may ask?"

"He's in France, learning the language. He came over two months ago, and he went right on to France. There ought to be a letter from him waiting for me here."

"There is too, my dear. At least there's a letter with one of those foreign stamps on it."

"That's good," said Ann, beaming, for a letter from Tom was an event.

"I hope he won't come to any harm over there," Mrs. Markham observed. "I didn't like it a bit when Mrs. Trefusis took my Bob abroad with her."

"Tom's quite able to look after himself," Ann answered. "It's father I'm worried about. I'm sure I ought to do something about it, but I feel so helpless."

At this point there was a knock at the door—the unmistakable knock of the postman. Mrs. Markham ran to collect whatever had come by the post. She

returned radiant. "I've a card from Bob," she cried. "He says he'll be over here to-morrow. I know, dear, we'll ask him what we ought to do about your father. He'll know what's best. Bob always knows everything."

Bob Markham, whom we have encountered for a moment already as the impassive chauffeur of Hilda Blakeway's immaculate Packard, was a very different person when he came to see his mother in her pretty little house at Bathease. For there was nothing naturally impassive about Bob Markham, who loved a joke above most things, except his mother, and had a natural instinct for letting himself go. In private life, Bob was noisy, boisterous, thoroughly good-natured; and withal, as his mother asserted, he undoubtedly had his head screwed on the right way.

As Bob sat in the luxuriant garden, with his mother and Ann Burton for an audience, he was telling of an adventure that had lately befallen his employer. He was recounting the story of the attempted burglary at Sun House, and of its ending in the burglar's accidental death by his own hand. "The extraordinary thing," he added, "is their never finding out who the man was. He was an old fellow, I understand. They say his picture was in the papers, but I missed it. I'm not much more one for reading the papers than you are, mother." He cast an affectionate glance at Mrs. Markham.

"Much too full of sorrow and wickedness and making a fuss about nothing for me," said his mother. "I never look at them. If anything happens I want to know about, some one always tells me. The only paper I ever read is the *Gardening World*."

"So you missed seeing about it," said Bob. "It kept my boss hanging about in London while they had an inquest, and that sort of thing. At least, I call him my boss, though it was Mrs. Blakeway who took me on,

when she was Mrs. Trefusis, and she still pays me my wages. She's not one to let things get out of her hands, though she is dead nuts on her new man."

"What sort is he, Bob?" Mrs. Markham asked. "You weren't quite sure whether you liked him at first."

Markham scratched his head. "I'm not sure I'm sure now, mother. He's a bit of a queer chap, the way he looks at you sometimes. Always very good-tempered and considerate, that I will say. Couldn't wish for a better, as far as that goes. But—I don't know why it is—he sometimes gives me a sort of creepy feeling, as if he was watching me like a cat and never letting on what was in his mind."

"I expect that's all imagination, Bob," said his mother. "What for should he be watching you?"

Bob laughed. "I expect it is. But you know how it is with some people. They give you that sort of feeling for no reason on earth, and it's no good trying to get away from it. Now, if the missus had married his friend, Mr. Fowler, I'd have felt quite different. Sam Fowler's one in a thousand—a real sport. Nothing creepy about him. He's staying down with us now."

"Are the young people there too?" Mrs. Markham asked.

"Yes, mother. Master Gregory's nearly sixteen now. I like him. He's a bit off-handed sometimes, as if he thought the blooming universe belonged to him, but he's straight and no nonsense about him. Shaping for a first-rate cricketer too, I'll say. By the way, I never told you I got eight wickets for thirty, last Saturday's match. Lucky for me the missus took the car out herself that day, or I'd have missed it."

The conversation turned for a while to Bob's, and incidentally young Gregory Trefusis's, prowess at cricket. But at length Bob's doings had been enough admired, and Mrs. Markham felt the moment had come for discussing her guest's troubles.

"You never asked what happened to the Captain, Bob," she said.

"Oh, him," said her son indifferently. "I supposed he'd be about somewhere."

"He's gone, Bob—I mean, disappeared," Mrs. Markham went on hastily, for she had a feeling that her son was on the point of saying "Good riddance!" as in fact he was. "You know, Mrs. Burton is his daughter. She's dreadfully worried about him going off without saying a word. He's been gone more than three weeks. Of course, I'd have told you about him before if you'd been able to get over to see me. But you've been so hard-worked, haven't you, poor boy? I did catch a sight of you driving the car one day, but you didn't come to see your old mother."

"That time I drove some of 'em over to look at the church? I couldn't get to see you then. They only stopped a few minutes. You know, mother, I'd have come over if I could. But this is absolutely the first chance I've had. There've been lots of people in the house, and it's been car for this jaunt and car for that from morning till night."

Mrs. Markham exonerated her son from all suspicion of neglecting her. "Mrs. Burton is afraid something may have happened to her father," she said.

"Oh, I expect he's all right—gone off on a jaunt of his own," said Bob. "Though it is rum, his not leaving word where he is. What about his things?"

"They're all here except what he took away in a black bag he had with him. All he said was he'd be back in a few days."

"Isn't there a Captain somebody he goes and stays with sometimes?"

"Captain Pollen, yes. I wrote there as soon as I got Mrs. Burton's note to say she was coming over. But there's been no answer."

Ann spoke at last. "You know, I'm really worried,

Bob. You see, I don't know what I ought to do about it, and Mrs. Markham said we ought to ask you. She has great faith in your judgment." Ann smiled. " So we want your advice."

Bob pondered. " Hasn't this Captain Pollen got a ship he goes to sea in ? " he asked.

" Yes, he has," Mrs. Markham answered. " It's some sort of a coasting boat that goes round from Bristol to London most of the time. But I don't know its name."

" That'll be it," said Bob. " Captain Pollen's gone on a voyage and taken the old gentleman with him. That's why you didn't get an answer to your letter."

" But," Ann put in doubtfully, " three weeks is such a long time. It wouldn't take them all that time to get from Bristol to London, or even there and back again. I've just come from Canada in' eight days."

" These coasting boats go pretty slow," said Bob, " specially if they're picking up or discharging cargo on the way. Or they may have gone on a longer trip than usual. I feel sure that's it. Or, of course, they might have got shipwrecked."

" What a dreadful idea ! " said Mrs. Markham. " If that's what you think, Bob, some one ought to make inquiries."

" It mayn't be that at all. Most likely it's just a longer voyage," Bob answered, feeling that it had been a mistake of taste to hint at a possible disaster at sea.

" I'm sure we ought to get inquiries made," Ann ventured. " But I haven't the least notion how to set about it. Do you know ? Does one go to the police ? "

" One might, if there was anything really to worry about. Probably there isn't. Here, mother, what's this Captain Pollen's address ? "

" Somewhere in Bristol, dear. I can't remember. My memory's not so good as it once was. I'll go and get it."

"Let me," said Bob, getting up. "If you'll tell me where it is."

"You'll never find it," was the answer.

"Then we'll both go," said Bob, and mother and son went into the house together, leaving Ann alone in the garden.

Ann liked young Bob Markham, who had grown from a boy into a man since she saw him last in Canada a good many years ago. That had been when Mrs. Markham, already a widow, was living in Toronto by letting furnished apartments, and Ann had gone to stay there while her father was away on a long voyage. The two women, though Mrs. Markham was much Ann's senior, had become close friends, and their friendship was the stronger because they found they were the victims of a common adversity. For Ann Burton's husband had been one of the men chiefly implicated in the great Land Bank scandal, and since he had fled, just in time to escape arrest, no word of him had ever reached her ears. That was twenty years ago now, and it had been already more than seven years past when she had become a lodger in Mrs. Markham's house. It was hard to know which of the women was the more to be pitied, for the late Simon Markham had been a cashier in the same bank, and when the crash came he had fallen under suspicion, and had blown out his brains, though his entire innocence of any complicity in the frauds was subsequently proved. So the two women—the widow and the wife who had no means of knowing whether she was a widow or not—had become friends, and the friendship had lasted through the years.

Ann Burton's father had been in those days a comparatively prosperous man—owner as well as captain of a tramp steamer of which he was inordinately fond. That was before he had taken to drink in real earnest, for though he had even then an inordinate taste for rum, it was not till about this time that the drink began to

get its real grip on him, and his powers to go. Home from a voyage, he had come to visit his daughter for a few days in Toronto, before returning to his beloved ship. Bob had been away then, at some holiday camp, but Captain Jay and Mrs. Markham had liked each other, and he had given young Tom Burton all manner of strange presents, brought home from his travels.

But Captain Jay had not stayed long with his daughter. He never did, for he was always pining to be back at sea with his ship. And after that Mrs. Markham had decided to go back with her boy and settle in England, for she had word of her parents' death within a few days of each other, and the old cottage at Bathease, with a tiny income, was now hers. So Ann saw no more of Mrs. Markham, though the two women kept up their friendship by corresponding.

After that, each time Ann saw her father, she observed in him a change for the worse. He was on his best behaviour when he was with her, but even so he was always getting drunk. That went on to the crowning disaster, when Captain John Jay, in a drunken suspense of judgment, ran his vessel to shipwreck and drowned half the crew. There was an inquiry, and he lost his captain's certificate as well as his ship; and after that he loafed about on shore, and drank almost continuously, despite all his daughter's efforts to keep him in order. The only thing that kept him sober was an occasional fit of revivalist religion, and when such fits passed, as they did, he always took to drinking worse than ever.

That went on—for Captain Jay had still enough money to get drunk on—for several years, and then the old man suddenly got homesick for the Old Country—for he was not, like his daughter, Canadian born. He persuaded an old friend, who had a ship of his own, to give him a passage to England; and Ann, not sorry to see him depart, because she felt his example was so bad for Tom, persuaded him to go and live with Mrs.

Markham at Bathease, in the hope that her influence would do something to keep him out of mischief. Ann herself would not leave Canada just then, for Tom was doing really well at school, and she meant to scrape for him until she had seen him safe through the university. Then she might go to England, at any rate on a visit, to see her father, and it was in fulfilment of this project that she had now arrived at Bathease, only to find that he had vanished.

The two Markhams came back out of the house. "I've got the address, dear," Mrs. Markham said. "Bob had to find it for me after all. It is 17 Ship Terrace, Avonmouth, Bristol."

"Then what do we do now, Bob?" Ann inquired.

"It's like this, Mrs. Burton," said Bob. "Mr. Blakeway has to drive over to Bristol in a couple of days to see to some business, and he'll want me to go with him, I expect, though he'll probably insist on driving most of the way himself. I can easily find time, while he's doing his business, to slip round to this address and see if Captain Pollen is there. Mr. Blakeway won't mind a bit, if I tell him what I want to go for, and, of course, I may not have to ask him at all. But he's a very obliging gentleman, and I'm sure there won't be any difficulty about it."

"It's awfully good of you," said Ann. "I only hope you'll find father is there after all, or at least they know where he is. If you'll do that, I needn't think of going to the police, or anything of that sort, till I get your news."

So it was arranged, and when Bob Markham hurried off to catch the bus back to Lambourn, Ann felt much more cheerful than she had been able to feel since her arrival at Bathease.

"I told you Bob would know what to do," said Mrs. Markham proudly. "Bob always knows what's the best thing to do."

"I'm sure you're right to be proud of him," said Ann.

"I am that," said Bob's mother. "Bob's the very best boy that ever was."

"Not better than my Tom," said Ann, "I won't have that."

"They're both the best boys in the world, I'm sure," said Mrs. Markham, reserving her private opinion that, whatever Tom Burton's merits might be, he could not possibly hold a candle to her beloved Bob.

CHAPTER VI

PHILIP GETS SOME SHOCKS

BOB MARKHAM did not broach the subject of his projected visit to Avonmouth until he and Philip Blakeway were well on the way to Bristol. Philip, though he had taken Markham, was driving, as he did most of the time; and the chauffeur was in the seat beside him. The opening he required was made for him by Philip himself.

"I expect I shall be at least a couple of hours in Bristol," said Philip, "apart from getting lunch. You'd better shove the car in the hotel garage and go to the pictures, or whatever you like. There's a cricket match, isn't there, but perhaps there's hardly time for that."

"I was wondering, sir, if you would object if I drove the car on to Avonmouth. There's a man I very much want to see there, if I possibly can. It's not for myself, it's for a friend. But, of course, not if it's in any way inconvenient, sir."

"Not a bit, Markham, as long as you're back by, say, four, or a bit after. You can pick me up at the lawyer's I'm going to." He gave the name and address.

"Thank you very much, sir. It's for a lady who is staying with my mother at Bathease. My mother takes in people in the summer, sir, as I dare say you know. And this lady is an old friend of hers."

"I'm ashamed to say, Markham, I didn't even know you had a mother, much less of her living in Bathease. It's a charming place, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. It's where her people come from. My mother's lived there all her life, except the years she spent in Canada."

Canada was a word that always tended to make Philip Blakeway jump. His hand was unsteady now, for a fraction of a second, at the wheel. "I didn't know you had any connection with Canada, Markham."

"I was born there, sir, in Winnipeg. That's where we lived then."

Again that barely perceptible tremor of the wheel. "Really, Markham. I've been in most places, but never in Canada. Have you a father, as well as a mother, at Bathease?"

"No, sir. Father's dead, been dead twenty years. I was only a tiny nipper when he died. He was cashier in a bank out there. Only it went smash." Thus far Bob Markham was prepared to go, but he had no intention of telling his employer the tragic story of his father's death.

Philip Blakeway drew the car in to the side of the road. "You take over for a bit," he said. "I'm driving damned badly this morning."

They changed seats. "So your mother left Canada and came back to England?"

"Yes, sir. A dozen years ago. She's only a very little money, and I was no good at school. So I took to the job that suited me. The lady who's staying with mother is a Canadian too. They were friends out there, when we were living in Toronto."

"So she's from Toronto, is she?"

"Yes, only she used to live in Vancouver earlier on, I believe. Her father was captain of a ship there in those days."

Philip Blakeway had gone white under the tan his

holiday had already given him. "What's her name, by the way, Markham? Not that it's any business of mine." Philip did his best to make his voice casual.

"Mrs. Burton, sir. It's her father that's disappeared." Bob, intent on the road, did not notice the agitation which his employer was trying vainly to repress.

Philip took time to steady his voice. "Has she any reason for thinking her father is in Bristol?" he asked.

"Well, sir, there's a man there he used to go and stay with sometimes, and it seemed possible they might know where he was. The man's a ship's captain too, sir, and we thought they might have gone off for a voyage together."

"Curious, though . . . the lady not knowing where her father is. What happened?"

"It's like this, sir. Mrs. Burton's father, he lives with mother when he's at home. He came back to settle down here some years ago. But Mrs. Burton, she's only just come over, expecting to find him with mother. But he's been gone three weeks and more, and left no address."

"I expect he'll turn up, Markham. What sort of a chap was—is he?"

"Between you and me, sir, I reckon he's a drunken old reprobate, and I'm best pleased if he's gone for good. But mother would keep him in the house, though he was always getting drunk, because of her doing it for Mrs. Burton's sake. I never held with it, I didn't. Not but what Mrs. Burton's a nice enough lady."

"All by herself, is she?" Again the tone was carefully casual.

"Yes, sir, though Mrs. Burton's got a son a bit younger than me. But he's in France. Been at college in Canada, sir, and quite a scholar. I understand he's got one of these free scholarships to go to Oxford. And he and me used to play around together when we were just nippers." *Acc- N6 21690*

"Is the son coming to Bathease too, Markham?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say, sir. But there, I've talked enough to you about my affairs. I hope I haven't been boring you, sir."

"Not at all," said Philip—and he never spoke a truer word.

Thereafter they talked of other things till they reached Bristol, where Markham deposited his employer at a hotel for lunch, ate a rapid snack himself, and then drove on to Avonmouth. Inquiries revealed that Ship Terrace was right down by the docks, so Bob parked the car and set out on foot. Number 17 proved to be a rather dilapidated house in a row of houses no less dilapidated, looking right out across a wharf. A ring at the old-fashioned bell-pull brought a very fat middle-aged woman to the door. Bob lifted his chauffeur's cap. "Does Captain Pollen live here?" he asked.

The fat woman looked him up and down. "Whether or no," she said, "you won't see him, young man."

"Why not?" Bob asked.

"'Cause he ain't at home," said the woman.

"Then he does live here?"

"In a manner of speaking. When he's at home, that is. Which he ain't."

"Do you mean he's away?"

"What else should I mean?" was the answer. "Stands to reason, if he ain't at home, he's away."

"Well, then, where is he?" Bob demanded.

"Blest if I know," said the woman. "Somewhere in the Channel, most like, if he ain't at the bottom of it."

"You mean he's at sea, do you?"

"Ain't I telling you he's at sea? Went off three days ago, with a cargo of mixed stuff out of Fishponds."

"Fishponds," said Bob, bewildered. "Do you mean fish?"

"No, of course I don't," was the answer. "I mean pottery."

Bob abandoned that particular mystery. "What I really want to know," he said, "is whether he has any one with him. Do you happen to know?"

"Course he has," said the woman. "D'you s'pose he works his ship all on his little lonesome?"

"I didn't mean that. I mean a friend. Do you know a friend of his called Captain Jay?"

"Him!" said the woman, in a tone of infinite contempt. "No, he ain't got that drunken old villain with him, as far as I know."

"But you know Captain Jay," Bob persisted. "Has he been here at all lately?"

"Not to my knowledge, I'm glad to say. This is a respectable house, and I don't hold with your Captain Jays making 'emselves blind with rum and roaring songs as ain't fit for a decent woman's ears, let alone my parrot, what's picked up some words off him no nice woman's bird oughtn't to know."

"But he hasn't been here lately, you say. How long is it since you saw him?"

"Matter of some months, I reckon. But, you look here, young man. What you asking all these questions for? Has Jay been up to something? Drunk and insulting the police, or what? You don't look like a busy, or I wouldn't have opened out to you in the way I did. Are you a busy, or what's the dope?"

"I'm simply a friend of Captain Jay's daughter, and she's getting anxious about him because he's been away and missing for more than three weeks."

"She'd be glad, if she'd got any sense. Well, I don't know where he is, and if I stand here gossiping all afternoon, how d'you expect me to get my work done? That's what I want to know."

"One more question," said Bob, "or rather two. When is Captain Pollen likely to be back? He was written to some time ago, and he never answered."

"Lord, he don't answer letters. And as for when

he'll be back, I expects him when I sees him. Might be a fortnight, might be a month. All depends what he picks up. Might come straight back from London, or might go right on to Newcastle, or Lord knows where."

"Is there any address in London where he could be reached?"

"See here, young man. You give me your word you ain't dunning him, or after him for anything he don't want to hear about."

"I assure you I'm not. I only want to find out if he knows where Captain Jay is."

"Then I don't mind telling you he can be found at the 'Goat and Compasses,' Fore Street, Limehouse, most times when he's in London. That's the only address I got. Or on his ship, of course. That's where he sleeps, mostly."

"What's her name?"

"The *Morning Glory*, Avonmouth. But there ain't much glory about her, not to look at, though she's been a good enough tub in her day. She's his, you know, and he can't bear to spend a ha'penny on paint."

With this scanty information Bob had to be content. He regained the car and drove back to Bristol, where he waited for a long time outside the solicitor's offices before his employer appeared.

"Get any news of your man?" Philip asked, when they were again on the road. Once more Bob Markham was at the wheel.

"No, sir, I am sorry to say. He was away at sea, and they didn't know when he would be back. And Mrs. Burton's father didn't appear to have been there either."

"So you had a fruitless journey?"

"Well, sir, I did get an address in London, where I might get news. Down Limehouse way, somewhere. But if we can't get any information there Mrs. Burton will want to take further steps. She's very much

worried about it, sir. What do you think she ought to do? Would the proper course be to go to the police?"

Philip considered before he answered. "If I were your mother's friend," he said at last, "I think I should hesitate before doing that. Probably her father has only gone off on a holiday, and I can tell you from experience that it's a good deal easier to call in the police than to get rid of them."

"I did think of asking the B.B.C. to broadcast a missing notice," Bob suggested.

"Your friend's father might not like that either," Philip objected. "Isn't it possible he doesn't want to be found at present? Of course, I know nothing of the circumstances, but surely that is a quite feasible explanation."

"I suppose it is, sir," said Bob doubtfully. "But I don't like Mrs. Burton being so worried. But you mean you would advise doing nothing more for a bit, but just wait to see if he turns up of himself?"

"You and your friend must judge of that, Markham. But I think that is what I should do if I were in the lady's place."

There the subject dropped, and Bob Markham found his employer unwontedly silent for the rest of the journey back to Lambourn. For Philip Blakeway had plenty to think about, and his thoughts were neither pleasant nor reassuring.

CHAPTER VII

A MISS IS AS GOOD AS A MILE

Two days after the trip to Bristol, Bob Markham found himself again at Bathease, with a chance to report upon his mission. He had written briefly to his mother after his return, but he felt it would be more satisfactory to supplement what he had said by a personal report.

Besides, he liked to go and see his mother, whenever he got the chance, and Mrs. Burton might want more of his advice. Of course, she might have taken action already, but in that case he wanted to know what she had done. For, though he felt no personal interest in Captain Jay, and Mrs. Burton was no more in his eyes than a rather nice friend of his mother's, he had his share of natural curiosity, and was not above a liking for having a finger in other people's affairs.

Bob happened to be in Bathease again so soon because Mrs. Blakeway and her daughter had driven over to a garden party in the neighbourhood. Philip, though the invitation had been accepted on his behalf as well, resolutely refused to go, and Bob gathered that Mrs. Blakeway had been annoyed. At all events, she seemed to be in a bad temper, and when he asked if he might go over and see his mother while they were at the party, the permission was none too graciously given. Still, it was given, and Bob was soon at his mother's little house, with a good hour free to devote to his own concerns.

Mrs. Markham and her visitor were both in the garden, hard at work with baskets and pairs of scissors. His mother ran down to the gate with a cry of welcome as she saw the Packard draw up before the gate. He kissed her and explained his presence, and within a few minutes she bustled away into the house to prepare one of her extra-special teas. Bob was left with Ann Burton in the garden, and he at once asked her if she had taken any action upon getting his news.

"Of course, I wrote off at once to that address you gave in London, though it didn't seem very hopeful. And I wrote to Tom in France, to tell him what had happened. There hasn't been time for any answers yet. Apart from that, I haven't done anything. Do you think I should?"

"Mr. Blakeway seemed to think it would be best to

wait," said Bob. "But I'm not so sure. If I were in your place, I think I'd ask the B.B.C. You know, they often send out messages about people who are missing, asking them to let their friends know where they are, or any one who has seen them to communicate with such and such an address. I don't know if they'll do it for anybody who asks, but I don't see why they shouldn't do it in this case."

"You think that's better than going to the police?" Ann asked.

"I think I should wait a bit before doing that. In fact, I'm not quite sure about asking the B.B.C. either. You see . . ." Bob became embarrassed. It was not easy to finish his sentence.

"Well, what do I see?" Ann inquired.

"I mean, isn't it just possible your father . . . Mightn't he be annoyed at having his affairs broadcast, or put into the hands of the police? What I mean to say is, mayn't he—prefer not to be found till he wants to?"

Ann looked at Bob with knitted brows. She seemed to find difficulty in following Bob's stumbling sentences. "I see," she said at length. "You mean he may have—got into trouble, and not want us to find him—that way?"

"I'm not sure I meant anything very definite," said Bob. "But one has to try to think of things all ways round."

"Quite," said Ann. "And, of course, father may have got himself into trouble. We both know he—drinks far too much, so we needn't pretend. But I don't feel that's what has happened. I tell you what. Bob. I'd better go up myself to this Limehouse place and see if there's any news of him, and, if there isn't, I'll go to the B.B.C. and ask them to send out a message."

Bob demurred. "That Limehouse address probably isn't the sort of place you ought to go to, especially

alone, Mrs. Burton. Look here, you leave it to me for a couple of days. Miss Sheila—that's our young lady—she's going up to London to stay with friends, and I'm to drive her up. I can pop down to Limehouse for you—easy—and make inquiries, and still get back in good time if I step on the gas. That'll be it, Mrs. Burton, and it'll be better to leave it, because that Captain Pollen may have had time to get to London by then. I expect he's still somewhere along the south coast now."

So it was arranged, and two days later, when Bob Markham held the door of the big Packard open for Sheila Trefusis to get in at the back, it was with every intention of going down to Limehouse on his mission of inquiry when he had deposited the girl with her friends.

A few miles from Lambourn, Sheila called out to Bob to stop the car. "I'm bored, Markham," she said, "so I'm coming in front to talk to you. Probably, later on, I'll drive." Which was not welcome news to Bob, for he was in a hurry, and Sheila was the world's worst driver.

She got in beside him. "Markham," she said, "d'you like being a chauffeur?"

"I've always been fond of cars, miss. And it's a better job than most."

"Oh, the driving part of it's all right. But do you like sitting there like a graven image, and saying 'Yes, miss' and 'No, miss,' and thinking all the time what a rotten lot we all are? We are, you know—absolutely rotten."

"If I did think that, miss, I should look out for another job," said Bob tactfully.

"What a liar you are, Markham!" said the young lady. "Can't you come off it for once in a while? I want to be amused. Tell me what you really think about me."

"I think you could do with some more driving lessons, miss."

"I will, if you'll give 'em me. But I mean, what do you think of me—as me?"

"I think you are a very determined young lady, miss."

"Meaning, keep off the grass, eh? Wouldn't mother have fits if she heard me talking to you like this?"

To that Bob said nothing.

"Well, if you won't tell me what you think about me, what d'you think of my new father?"

"Mr. Blakeway is always very considerate, miss."

Sheila blazed: "That's what he is. Too damn considerate by half. It makes me absolutely sick the way he considers one. I hate my stepfather, Markham. Isn't that wrong of me? And isn't it wrong of me to tell you?"

"It is unfortunate, miss. I'm not much given to hating people."

"I am," said Sheila. "Your name's Bob, isn't it?"

"Yes, miss."

"I wonder what you're like when you're off duty, Bob? I believe you're quite different, aren't you?"

"Possibly, miss."

"I do wish you'd be your natural self for half a minute. Can't you see I'm trying to flirt with you, just because I'm bored?"

"Perhaps I don't find that particularly flattering, miss."

"Oh, but it is, really," said Sheila. "I should simply love flirting with you if you were a gentleman, Bob."

There was a dangerous glint of exasperation in Bob Markham's usually mild and benevolent eyes. "But as I'm not," he said, dropping the "miss" for the first time.

"That makes it all the more fun," said Sheila.

"Fortunately," Bob answered, "it takes two to flirt."

"Oh, you're hopeless." Sheila gave it up. "Here, let me drive."

Bob stopped the car, and they changed seats. Sheila Trefusis drove on a little in silence. Then she said, "Well, what about that driving lesson you promised me?" and for the next few miles the conversation was severely practical.

But soon she had had enough of Bob's none too merciful criticism. "You take over now," she said. "And let me tell you you're a brute of the first water." They changed places again.

"Do you like girls?" Sheila asked.

"No, not in that way," Bob answered.

"What way?"

"That way."

"Oh!" said Sheila. "Not any girls?"

"I haven't got one, if that's what you mean."

"And don't want one, not even to play with? What a life!"

"Miss Trefusis," said Bob, "I like my present job, and I don't want to change it. But there are some circumstances that might compel me to change."

"Meaning me? Oh, all right, Mr. Bob Markham. I won't try to flirt with you any more. On one condition—that you tell me what you really think of our Philip."

"I think what I said. He's very considerate."

"But you don't like him all the same. Of course, I know it's absolutely the limit my talking to you like this. But I simply had to, or I should burst. Gregory loathes him even more than I do. He always maintains he's a crook really. Do you think he is?"

"Not at all, miss." Bob slipped back into the old way of address. "And I shouldn't go on thinking so if I were you. I think Mr. Blakeway is only a little too much given to trying to please people, and that sometimes gives offence."

"But I'm absolutely certain he married mother for her money."

"I think Mrs. Tre—Blakeway is very much attached to him, miss."

"If you say 'Miss' again, Mr. Bob Markham, I withdraw my promise. Of course, mother's all over him. That's what makes it worst of all. But you do really think there's nothing wrong with him, except his oily manners?"

"What should be wrong?"

"Damned if I know. But he's been very odd since he came back from Bristol the other day. Sort of jumpy. You don't know if anything happened to account for it, do you?"

Bob disclaimed all knowledge. "I think you're only imagining things because you don't like Mr. Blakeway," he said.

By this time the car was among the outskirts of London, and the occupants fell silent as Bob steered his way through an increasing mass of traffic. They crossed the river, and were soon nearing Sheila's destination. "Don't give me away, Bob, will you?" she said, just before the car drew up outside a house in Eaton Place. "But I'll tell you something. If I need lessons in driving, what you need is lessons in flirting."

"I rather thought I'd been having one," said Bob.

"That wasn't a lesson," said Sheila. "That was an experiment. Because I think you're rather a dear."

"Yes, miss," said Bob, with the first smile of the day, as he got down from his seat to open the door for her to alight.

Having dropped Sheila Trefusis and her belongings, Bob Markham turned the Packard in the direction of Limehouse. Whew! That had been an experience, and he flattered himself he had managed it rather well. For it was by no means true that Bob had no experience of mild flirtation and no taste for girls. He had, in fact, rather a way with him, and was fond of feminine society. But flirtation with his employer's daughter fell outside

his code of decent conduct, even if the lady made all the running, as Sheila Trefusis had undoubtedly done. Yet it had not been so easy as he had made it seem to stall her off like that. Perhaps he had succeeded the better because he had not been taken wholly by surprise. Sheila had never behaved at all like that before. Indeed, she was apt to be rather specially stand-offish. But he had seen her looking at him before to-day with a look not devoid of human interest, and while he had not expected her to break out in that way, he was not quite astonished when she did. But what the devil did the girl mean by talking to him in that fashion about her stepfather? It put him in an impossible position. In fact, it was a damned nuisance, because he liked his present job, above all as it meant being near his mother. But if Sheila was going on like that, his job would become impossible. Oh, hell! And yet . . . his recent experience hadn't been wholly unpleasant. He could have lured the girl on and enjoyed it if he had let himself go. Why hadn't he? That was what the minx wanted. Well, there were just some things that weren't done.

By this time he was nearing Limehouse. He stopped, and asked a policeman the way to the "Goat and Compasses," in Fore Street. It proved to be, not one of your garish giants of modern public-houses, but a little old place in a rather squalid street. Bob parked the car, which was at once surrounded by a crowd of children, offered the biggest threepence on his return for standing guard over it and preventing interference by the others, and went into the private bar, which was tenanted only by three ancients, with an air of the sea, drinking hot rum.

Bob called for a bitter, which was served by a wizened man with a wooden leg and a hook where there should have been an arm. "I'm looking for a Captain Pollen," Bob said. "They told me in Bristol he could be found here when he was in London. Do you know if he's about?"

"Ain't seen him these four weeks," said the barman. "'E was in here about that while ago, but 'e ain't bin 'ere since. Say, Cap'n Cross'n, you seen anything of Cap'n Pollen these days?"

The man addressed shook his head, and the other two ancients shook their heads as well. "No, I haven't seen him," said the first. "He was loaded up for Poole last time I saw him, and that's a month ago."

"He was in here just before he sailed," said another. "We had a drink together because of what he called his deliverance."

"What was that, Ben?" asked Captain Crossman. "I didn't hear naught of that."

"Fellow called Jay he was always on about," said the other. "He said he'd have just one more with me because now Jay wouldn't trouble him no more. He'd had one over the eight already, but I humoured him, and we had one together, or maybe mor'n one."

"It's Captain Jay I really want to get into touch with," said Bob. "I understood he might be with Captain Pollen."

"Well, he ain't, or anyway he wasn't when I saw Pollen," said the other, who was now presented to Bob as Captain Gunner—"which is a rummy name, but he's got used to it. *He* told me, positive, he'd never see that old bastard no more. Them were his very words, here in this identical spot where I'm sitting."

"He didn't say what had happened to Captain Jay, did he?" asked Bob.

"Well, he did say something about Jay having struck oil, and not bothering him no more. But what he kept on saying was he was quit of him for good, and he thanked the Lord. Which, if what he's said about Jay's half true, I should myself."

"Any of you know Captain Jay?" Bob inquired.

There was a shaking of heads, and then Captain Gunner shoved his glass in the direction of the barman.

"This lot's on me," said Bob. "What's yours, gentlemen?"

There was a chorus of "The usual, Charlie," and Bob had another bitter to keep company.

"What did Captain Pollen use to say about Captain Jay?" Bob went on.

Gunner chuckled. "What didn't he? He used to call him all the names under the sun." There followed certain samples of Captain Pollen's eloquence, with which it seems unnecessary to sully these pages. It emerged that Captain Jay had been in the habit of sponging on Captain Pollen, in the name of old comradeship, and there was a suggestion about it of more than sponging—in fact, of something very like blackmail. For Captain Pollen appeared to be an unguarded talker when he was in his cups.

Bob could not, however, get any further information, or discover when Captain Pollen was likely to visit the "Goat and Compasses" again. There was a letter waiting for him. That was admitted, and the letter produced, with the Bathease postmark. Bob added to it another, a scribbled note adjuring Captain Pollen to write to Mrs. Burton at once and tell anything he knew about Captain Jay's recent movements. But that was all he could do, and he felt that the news he would have to convey to Bathease would not be reassuring. It sounded as if something serious had happened to Mrs. Burton's father. At all events, this man Pollen evidently knew something, and it was indispensable to get into touch with him as soon as possible.

Bob found his mercenary faithfully guarding the car, made the threepence sixpence because he had been longer than he expected, and set out on his return journey at the utmost speed he could venture on with safety. Five minutes after his departure, had he but known it, Captain Pollen, just in from Bristol, arrived at the "Goat and Compasses" and received his two letters,

which he promptly tore up and flung into the grate. For Captain Pollen devoutly hoped he had heard the last of Captain John Jay, and had no intention of getting into touch with anybody about him, if he could possibly help it.

CHAPTER VII OF MANY THINGS

"THIS is London calling," said the smooth, cultured voice. "First of all, there is an S.O.S. message we have been asked to broadcast. Will any person who knows anything of the present whereabouts or recent movements of Captain John Jay, of Bathease, in Berkshire, formerly of Vancouver, Canada, please communicate at once with his daughter, Mrs. Philip Burton, Bathease, Berkshire, or with the police. Captain John Jay left his home in Bathease nearly a month ago, and has not been seen since. Please communicate at once. The name is Captain John Jay, of Bathease, in Berkshire. That is the only S.O.S. You will now hear the second news bulletin. The anticyclone over Iceland . . ." And so on.

"Oh, do turn the beastly thing off," said Gregory Trefusis. "Who cares about the news anyway?"

"Unless your father does," Hilda Blakeway suggested. "Do you want it on, Philip?"

"No, no, switch it off," said Philip, though he would far sooner have allowed the cultured voice to run on, as a screen for his thoughts. If it were switched off he would have to talk, and he did not feel like talking.

"I never knew so many people disappeared till the wireless came in," said Hilda. "I wonder what happens to them all."

"I think they mostly get found," said Philip. "Quite a lot of them have probably run away from their wives—or husbands, as the case may be."

"Some of them get murdered," Gregory put in. "They say the great thing for a murderer to do is to hide the body, if he can manage it, because they can't convict him till they find the body, even if they feel sure he's done it. I believe it's jolly difficult to hide a body. At any rate, it always seems to get found in the detective stories."

"Have you taken to reading detective stories, Gregory?" his mother asked. "I do hope they're not bad for you. You seem quite to have given them up lately, Philip."

"One gets bored all of a sudden," said Philip, "and doesn't want to read any more. I daresay I'll take to them again sometime. There aren't nearly enough good ones, you know."

"I never have understood the craze for murder stories," said his wife. "I don't like it in a woman. I think it's morbid. Of course, it may be different for a man."

"I like them," said Gregory. "Ordinary novels are either soppy or too full of people behaving in idiotic ways you can't understand. Murders are straightforward. You know where you are."

"I thought it was rather the object of the writers to prevent you knowing where you are," said Philip.

"I mean they're about something," Gregory replied. "Not all about people's feelings, and that sort of mush."

Philip did feel that he and Gregory had been getting on better these last few days. He had tried really hard, ever since his marriage, to make the boy like him, and all his efforts had seemed only to make matters worse. Then at last, when Gregory had been impossibly rude with his hints about something fishy in connection with the death of the burglar at Sun House, Philip, with his nerves on edge, had lost his temper, and given young Gregory a good large piece of

his mind. That, so far from straining relations further, had drawn from the boy the first smile he had ever accorded Philip. "All right, keep your hair on," he had said, with an unexpectedly pleasant grin, and thereafter he had ceased to glower whenever Philip came into the room, or made any remark to him. Philip, for his part, rejoiced at the change, but was far too wise to do anything to improve the occasion. He dropped his attempts to make friends, and took as little notice of Gregory as he could. That seemed to be working much better. Gregory would never have deigned to discuss anything with him a week ago, but now they had been talking quite normally.

For a wonder, there were no guests at Lambourn that week. Hilda, tired with entertaining, had allowed a few days' interval, and, with Sheila away in London, the three of them were alone. Hilda commented on it favourably. "Really, it's quite nice to have the place to ourselves for a change," she said. "I wonder how Sheila's getting on with the Camerons. I expect she's having a gay time."

"Trust Sheila to look after herself," said Gregory. "She can't ever see a man without making eyes at him. I caught her making eyes at Markham the other day, to keep in practice."

"Gregory, you really mustn't say such things," said his mother. "As if Sheila would make eyes at Markham. In any event," she added inconsequently, "I'm sure Markham is eminently safe."

"That's all you know about it, mother," said Gregory. "I assure you Markham's the deuce of a lad when he's off duty. I shouldn't think he'd take to Sheila, though. Not his type. I should say, from observation, he likes 'em pink and plump."

"Gregory, you awful boy, I won't have you talking like that. I'm sure Markham is a thoroughly respectable young man. He has such a nice mother too, and he's

devoted to her. Have you met her, Philip? She keeps a sort of lodging-house, and sells teas, over at Bathease."

"No," said Philip. "But Markham's spoken of her."

"I really feel I ought to go over and see her," said Hilda. "I haven't been for a long while. I know, Philip. We're doing nothing to-morrow. So we'll go over in the afternoon, and let her give us tea. She'll be delighted, and it will please Markham too. He's always glad of a chance to get over to see his mother."

"Sorry, darling," said Philip. "I'm afraid I can't manage it. I really have got a lot to do."

"Then what about Friday?" Hilda persisted.

"The Storments are coming over to tea and tennis then," said Philip, rejoiced to have a reasonable excuse this time.

"Then I suppose I'd better go to-morrow. But I do think you might come, Philip. I'm sure it's all nonsense your having too much to do. You haven't done a stroke of work since you arrived here."

"All the more left for to-morrow," said Philip, with his most charming smile. He crossed to Hilda's chair and kissed her. "Why not stop at home and keep me company?" he asked.

"Of course, if you don't want me to go . . ."

"It's not that, darling. By all means, go if you want to. But why shouldn't we stay quietly at home now we have got the place to ourselves for a day or two?"

"Very well, angel. But I simply must call in and see Mrs. Markham some day soon. We'll take a party over to tea there some week-end. Her teas are really excellent, and Bathease is such a pretty little place."

So, thanks to Philip's diplomacy, the risk of a meeting between Hilda Blakeway and Ann Burton was put off for the time. Of course, there might be no real danger in it, but then again who knew what might happen. Supposing Hilda were to take a fancy to Ann. She did take fancies to people quite suddenly. Then the fat

would be in the fire. And on no account whatever would Philip Blakeway show himself in the neighbourhood of Bathease. Twenty years were twenty years, but . . . Philip pondered whether he could make some excuse for shutting up Lambourn, and taking Hilda and the children abroad for the rest of the summer. But that was difficult. There were strings of guests invited, and what reason could he possibly give? No, he supposed he would have to stick it out.

Meanwhile, as we know, Ann Burton, having failed to get into touch with Captain Pollen, had set other agencies in motion to discover her father. She had gone up to town herself and interviewed an incredibly suave young gentleman at Broadcasting House. He had said that he would be only too happy to help, but she must understand that the B.B.C. got so many appeals, and they had to make rules from which it was beyond his power to depart. One of these rules was that they should broadcast appeals for persons missing only with the consent and at the request of the police. So, if she wanted the B.B.C. to do anything, she must go to the police first. He was very sorry, and he would of course take down the particulars, in case it became necessary to send out a broadcast message later on. Which he did, and then, as soon as she had gone, chucked his notes into the wastepaper basket, for if any action was taken, the police would of course supply the particulars all over again. The suave young man, however, had done his duty. He was paid to be suave to all comers, and suave he was, in excellent English—for the B.B.C. cherishes an ineradicable hope that if it persistently addresses the public in good English with a cultured accent, by and by it will be as if the entire population of Great Britain had been educated at Winchester, and what nobler ideal can democracy set itself than that?

So Ann Burton had gone to the police—at Newbury, which was the nearest place to Bathease where there was a police station of any size. They too had been sympathetic, though they seemed to think her father would probably turn up again unharmed in his own good time. Their sympathy was neither so suave nor so well phrased as that of the young man at the B.B.C. But it did, in face of Ann's persistence, raise Captain John Jay to the posthumous dignity of being mentioned on the wireless, in a message that was broadcast from all stations as a prelude to the weather forecast and news bulletins of the day.

Ann's visit also induced the police to go in search of Captain Pollen. From Newbury it was arranged that an officer of the Metropolitan Police should seek the captain out and find out whether he had any information to impart. But by the time the police had reached the place where Captain Pollen's ship had been, that worthy had set out again on his voyaging, bound for Newcastle-on-Tyne. All that could be done was to arrange with the Newcastle police to question him as soon as he arrived.

The wireless appeal for news of Captain Jay produced absolutely nothing, except the half-dozen or so letters from madmen which any appeal on any subject can be guaranteed to produce at any time. Nothing came that the B.B.C. officers could not classify at once as "mad stuff," or that it was even worth the while of the police to investigate at all. It must be confessed that the Newbury police, with whom the responsibility lay, were not disposed at this stage to take the matter very seriously. Having made arrangements for the broadcast appeal, and for having Captain Pollen interviewed when he could be got hold of, they felt that they had done their bit, if not more, in a case which seemed to them to offer every prospect of solving itself with the missing man's unsolicited return—if indeed he had not gone

away actually in order to escape his daughter, in which case he would probably not return at all. There might be some reason for this, which Mrs. Burton, despite her apparent straightforwardness, had not chosen to reveal to the police. At all events, for the time being, their duty was done, and they dismissed the matter from their minds pending further developments.

Bob Markham did not get over to Bathease while these events were taking place. He was, in fact, rather busily occupied at Lambourn, when he was off duty, for he was having a very pleasant little affair, all within the bounds of propriety, with the daughter of the new schoolmaster in the village. She was, according to Gregory Trefusis's prescription, pink and plump, and she displayed a maidenly modesty which was in pleasing contrast with Sheila's storm detachment methods. It was hardly a love affair, at any rate as yet, but it was one of the better preludes to a possible love affair, and it took up for the present all Bob Markham's spare time. The Vicar's nursery governess, who had been the last, pined forgotten, until she paired off with the wild-eyed young man who had just started the new garage up at the cross-roads—an affair which had to be conducted in delicious secrecy because the young man was an acknowledged atheist and republican, and the things the Vicar was in the habit of saying about him were no credit to his cloth.

That, however, is beside the point, which is that Bob Markham was fully occupied, and inclined to let Mrs. Burton's affairs slip out of his mind. In the meantime, however, Ann Burton's letter had reached her son where he was staying in France to learn the language. Young Tom Burton cursed when he got his mother's letter, for he was enjoying himself on his first visit to a foreign country and he did not want to leave. But his mother seemed to be worried really seriously about her father's disappearance, and Tom, though he was

disposed to think that she was fussing unnecessarily and that the old boy would turn up of himself before long, was a dutiful son, and quite prepared, if he felt he really ought to, to go to her aid. He was, however, very loth to go, especially as his grandfather would probably have been found by the time he arrived. So he wired, expressing sympathy, and saying he would come back at once if needed and in any case if the old man had not turned up within a week.

Ann, getting his wire, fully understood what was in his mind, and was very reluctant to bring him to England on what might prove to be a wild-goose chase. She wired back, telling him not to come just yet; for she had made up her mind to wait until the police had found Captain Pollen, and heard what he had to tell.

So Ann stayed at Bathease, helping Mrs. Markham in the garden, and exchanging endless stories about the virtues, charms and cleverness of Bob and Tom; while Philip, twenty miles off, successfully resisted Hilda's desire to take him over to Bathease with Gregory to visit Mrs. Markham, and further improved his relations with the boy by the simple method of letting him alone.

Sam Fowler came down again to Lambourn for the week-end. He could not get away for longer, because he had to look after the business with Philip away. Philip had half a mind to tell him what Markham had said about Ann Burton's presence at Bathease, and the endeavours she was making to trace Captain Jay. Indeed, he half expected Sam to raise the matter, by asking if he knew who had caused that wireless message about Jay to be sent out. But Sam, it appeared from his not mentioning the matter, had not heard the message about Jay, and Philip, on second thoughts, decided to say nothing. It would only put the wind up Sam, who had been a special friend of Ann Burton's in the old days, and for the present why shouldn't Philip

continue to consume his own smoke? There was no point in worrying Sam, unless real necessity arose.

It did arise, sooner than he expected, for Hilda, in accordance with her expressed intention, promptly raised the question of their all driving over to Bathease for tea on Sunday, and Sam, unconscious of the meaning of a nudge from Philip, said at once that it would be just what he would like, because Bathease looked so jolly at that time of year.

"We'll 'phone up the post office to let Mrs. Markham know we're coming," said Hilda, "and then she'll have tea ready for us. Home-made scones and home-made jam, with no wasps in it. Doesn't that make your mouth water, Mr. Fowler?"

"My mouth always waters," Sam laughed. "As you know, I've a whale of an appetite."

Philip racked his brains for a way of putting a stop to the expedition, but for the moment he could think of none. It would be useless for him merely to refuse to go on some flimsy pretext. For then the others, including Sam, would probably go without him, and for Sam to go might be just as bad as for him. For Sam had changed hardly more than he in those twenty years, and was practically as certain to be recognised if he came face to face with Ann. Fortunately, Mrs. Markham had probably not known either of them by sight, though her late husband had. But, with Ann there, well, it was the very devil. That expedition had to be stopped somehow.

Philip made up his mind to tell Sam what had happened. So he led him away after lunch on Saturday for a walk, and passed on to him everything that Bob Markham had said. Of course, Sam Fowler saw at once how serious it all was, for if once Ann Burton were to see either of them, the fat would be in the fire. They talked and talked, and at length they concocted a plan, which resulted in a call by Sam at a telegraph office

some miles from Lambourn—Philip remaining discreetly out of sight. Sam sent a wire to his head clerk, asking that worthy to telegraph to him at once at Lambourn, demanding his return to town on a business matter of urgent importance.

The telegram arrived at Lambourn the same evening, before dinner. Sam tore it open, in Hilda's and Gregory's presence, and read it out loud to Philip across the room. "That must be about that Puttenham business," he said. "I was afraid something'd go wrong." He turned to Hilda. "I'm afraid that means I must dash back to London to-night, Mrs. Blakeway," he said. "I'm extremely sorry, but Sanders wouldn't have wired unless it had been something really important."

"What a nuisance," said Hilda. "And I'm sure you needed a rest. Can't you deal with it over the telephone?"

"Sanders isn't on the 'phone . . . and I couldn't, in any case. No, there's no help for it. I'll have to go back. I suppose Philip will trust me to see it through."

"I really think I'd better come up with you, Sam," said Philip. "You see, it's a big thing, and sometimes two heads are better than one at seeing a way out of a difficulty."

His wife protested, and Sam Fowler seemed at first to join in, though half-heartedly, on her side. But he made it plain that he would feel more comfortable if Philip were with him, as he didn't know quite what the matter was, and it might be necessary to take a quick decision. He even tried to explain something about the trouble to Hilda, but she stopped him, saying that she never had been able to understand business.

"If you must go, I suppose you must," she said at last. "But I shan't cancel our trip to Bathease, now I've made the arrangement. Gregory and I will get Markham to drive us over. But I shall promise Mrs. Markham, Philip, that I will bring you to see her next time."

Philip and Sam therefore drove off in the direction of London, ostensibly to stay the night at Sam's flat. But actually they never got to London. They had a week-end together at the Old Ship at Brighton instead.

CHAPTER IX

A VISIT TO BATHEASE, AND SOME CRICKET

HILDA BLAKEWAY and Gregory Trefusis were taking tea at Bathease. There were several parties at the little green tables set out at the side of the house, but Hilda and Gregory were given a table of honour, set for them in the midst of Mrs. Markham's roses, where no mere tourists were ever allowed to take their refreshment. Bob, in his shirt-sleeves, was helping his mother in the little kitchen, and Ann Burton, who had turned herself for the occasion into a volunteer waitress, brought Hilda and Gregory their things, and shared with the little maid who came in to help at week-ends the service at the remaining tables. Mrs. Blakeway sat long over her tea, for she had come to be polite to Mrs. Markham, and there was no chance of a word with her until the other tea-takers had gone. Besides, it was nice and cool in their corner of Mrs. Markham's garden, though the visitors at the other tables had sat out in the glare, and Hilda Blakeway was placidly comfortable, and in no hurry to move. Gregory was more restless, but he had brought a book, and soon reconciled himself to his mother's immobility.

At last Mrs. Markham came bustling up, full of hopes that Mrs. Blakeway had enjoyed her tea, and been nicely looked after, despite her own preoccupations in the kitchen. "Though I'm sure you have that," she added, "for it was good of Mrs. Burton, who's a lady and staying in the house, to help me out this afternoon when I should have been fairly run off my feet. Bob's

been a great help too, ma'am. He's washing up for me now."

Hilda made the correct remark by saying that they all liked Mrs. Markham's son very much, and thought highly of his character as well as of his work. This led to a spate of motherly remarks, which Bob, still busy in the kitchen, was not present to reprove. Ann was in there too, helping him.

Mrs. Markham, having said as much about her son as she felt she could at one go, introduced again the subject of her visitor. "It's so sad for the poor lady," she said, "having lost her father."

Hilda replied suitably that it was very sad, but that most people had to lose their fathers some time in their lives.

"Oh, but I don't mean he's dead," Mrs. Markham explained. "At least, of course I hope he isn't. I mean he's disappeared, out of this very house where he was staying. I made sure Mr. Blakeway would have mentioned it to you, ma'am. I know Bob told him about it."

"My husband didn't say anything to me," said Hilda, not greatly interested.

Gregory emerged from his book. "I say, d'you mean the chap's absolutely been and disappeared, like the fellow they were talking about over the wireless the other night? I remember now, they said something about Bathease in the message, only I wasn't listening much. Do tell us all about it, Mrs. Markham. What happened?"

Mrs. Markham explained how Captain Jay had been living with her, and had gone away about a month ago, with only a small bag, leaving all the rest of his belongings, and apparently expecting to return almost at once. Since then, there had been no sign of him, and his daughter, arriving from Canada and expecting to find him, had heard nothing from him and had no idea



where he was. Mrs. Markham explained how Bob had tried to help in tracing him at Bristol and London, and had asked Mr. Blakeway's advice, and how Mrs. Burton had subsequently gone to the B.B.C. and the police, who had got that wireless message sent out for her, but so far with no result.

"I expect the bloke's dead," said Gregory callously. "P'raps he's been murdered."

"Please don't talk like that, Gregory," said his mother. "Mrs. Burton might overhear you, and it makes my flesh creep."

"Would you like me to introduce Mrs. Burton to you, ma'am?" Mrs. Markham asked. "I'm sure she's a very nice lady indeed."

Hilda, always amiable when it cost her nothing, politely acquiesced, and Mrs. Markham went off to look for Ann, who was reluctant to come, but did not like to refuse. The introduction was duly effected, and Hilda, having looked Ann up and down to revise her impressions of the "waitress," accepted her new status of "lady" by inviting her to sit down.

"Mrs. Markham has been telling me about your father, Mrs. Burton. I do hope he will come back to you all right. I don't think I have ever met him, though of course I have been over here to tea before, and I understand he lived in this house."

Neither Ann, now seated, nor Mrs. Markham, who remained standing, enlightened Hilda as to the reason, though Ann could guess it quite well. It had been a regular arrangement that Captain Jay, not being exactly a presentable person, should keep out of the way when Mrs. Markham was serving strangers.

"Do sit down, Mrs. Markham," said Ann, who thought Hilda excessively rude to leave the older woman standing.

"Yes, of course, come and sit down, Mrs. Markham," echoed Hilda, to whom the idea would never have

occurred. Not that she would have kept the old woman standing on purpose; but, in her world, ladies sat down and non-ladies did not, when there were ladies anywhere around.

Mrs. Markham, who had come since her return to England to accept again Hilda's rather than Ann's custom, sat down uncomfortably. It did not feel right to be sitting talking to Bob's mistress. But she sat.

"It must be dreadfully worrying for you, Mrs. Burton, not knowing what has happened to your father. But I expect there is nothing to worry about really. You come from Canada, don't you, like Mrs. Markham? Only of course she's not a real Canadian. She was born in England. Is your husband a Canadian, Mrs. Burton? I suppose you have left him over there."

"My husband has been dead a very long time," said Ann, without hesitation. She had made that answer so many times before. "But my son's in France. He's just going up to Oxford."

"That's where I mean Gregory to go," said Hilda. "His father was at Magdalen, you know. It's quite a family tradition. Where is your son going, Mrs. Burton?"

"Balliol. They took him there because of the scholarship he got at home."

"Oh, so he's clever, like Gregory. Was your husband at Oxford, Mrs. Burton?"

"No, he came out to Canada when he was quite a boy. But a lot of his relations were at Cambridge."

"I want to go to Cambridge," said Gregory suddenly.

"But you've always wanted to go to Oxford," his mother expostulated. "And you know I want you to go to Magdalen, where your father was."

"I've changed my mind. Jack Adams is going to Cambridge."

"There's plenty of time for you to change your mind again, Gregory," said Hilda. "He's only sixteen, you know, Mrs. Burton."

"He looks more," said Ann truthfully; for Gregory did look at least a year older.

"I wish we could do something to help find your father," said Hilda. "I am sure my husband would be delighted to do something if he could. But if you have put the matter in the hands of the police, I expect they are doing whatever can be done."

"I don't know about that," said Gregory. "They often make out the police the most gruesome muttonheads in the detective stories."

"The police inspector was very kind," said Ann. "But he wasn't really helpful, or very hopeful either. He seemed to think father would turn up of himself. And Bob told me Mr. Blakeway advised doing nothing when he consulted him."

Bob came out of the house at that moment and Hilda called to him, "Markham!"

"Yes, madam." Bob came and stood waiting for orders.

"We have been talking about Mrs. Burton's father, Markham. I understand you consulted Mr. Blakeway about it."

"Yes, madam. Mr. Blakeway was good enough to let me make some inquiries at Bristol."

"I am sure he would wish you to do all you can to help," said Hilda, and added, as a saving clause, "of course, as far as your duties allow." She went on, "Is there anything more you think can be done?"

"It seems to be a case of waiting for Captain Pollen to turn up, madam. The police have that in hand."

"I meant anything else, Markham. Does nothing occur to you?"

"Nothing, madam. Unless, of course, one was to call in a private detective, and I understand they cost a lot of money, and aren't mostly any good."

"I don't think that would be necessary, Markham. If anything does occur to you, you'll be sure to do it,

won't you? Of course, we should have to arrange it when we didn't require you."

In fact, Bob thought, you're kindness itself, as long as somebody else does the work and it doesn't interfere with your convenience. Bob shrugged his mental shoulders. Mrs. Blakeway was a good employer—only it never occurred to her that the world hadn't been made to suit her and her friends. "Certainly, madam," he said. "But I am afraid nothing does occur to me."

"Have you thought of advertising, Mrs. Burton? Isn't there something called the agony column, where people put notices of that sort?"

"I might advertise, I suppose," said Ann. "But I don't feel that it would be much good. Father hardly ever opens a paper, and I should have thought that the B.B.C. announcement would have been more likely to reach him. It was mentioned quite a lot in the papers."

"Couldn't you get them to print a photograph of your father, in case any one had seen him about somewhere?" Gregory suggested.

"The only one I have is years old," said Ann. "And he looks quite different since he let his beard grow. I don't think any one would recognise him, from his photograph." She did not mention that the recent changes in Captain Jay's appearance were due even more to other causes—especially rum—than to the beard. "But I suppose I had better try that, if nothing else happens. If father isn't heard of in the next few days, Tom will come back from France to help me look for him. I think I had better do nothing till he comes, or we hear from Captain Pollen. It is very strange of him not to have written, as he must have got both Mrs. Markham's letter and mine."

"Do you know Captain Pollen?"

"No. I've heard father speak of him often. But I haven't met him since I was a child. I shouldn't know him if I saw him. But he and father are old friends."

Hilda rose. "Well, Gregory, we must be going. Will you get the car ready, Markham? So glad to have seen you again, Mrs. Markham. And perhaps—" Hilda was not quite sure whether to go so far or not, but Ann Burton did seem to be a lady and she had a son going to Oxford—"perhaps Mrs. Burton will come over and take tea with us one day at Lambourn, and talk things over with my husband. He has been in America such a lot, though I believe he has never actually visited Canada."

"You are very kind," said Ann. "Perhaps, some day . . ."

"And you must bring your son, if he has arrived by then. We can easily send Markham over for you with the car. I know how he likes coming to see you, Mrs. Markham."

"You are very good, ma'am," said Mrs. Markham. "I am sure Mrs. Burton will be delighted to come."

Philip, without Sam, who had returned to the business, got back to Lambourn by train on Monday—for they had gone off in Sam Fowler's car—and was met at the station by Markham.

"Did Mrs. Blakeway go over to see your mother yesterday, Markham?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, and Master Gregory. My mother was very pleased."

"Is the lady who has lost her father still staying there? I forget her name."

"Mrs. Burton, sir. Yes, Mrs. Blakeway had quite a long talk with her."

"I hope her father has been found."

"No, sir. There's no news yet. But the police are looking for him."

"Oh, quite. Nothing else happened, Markham? At home, I mean."

"No, sir." For Bob did not regard it as his place to

tell his employer that Hilda had asked Mrs. Burton over to tea, while a certain disturbing passage in his own life, not unconnected with the new schoolmaster's daughter, was none of his employer's business.

They reached home, and Gregory, who was practising cricket strokes on the front lawn, gave Philip, for once, quite a smile of welcome. "Back again, my boy," said Philip. "Mother about?"

"She's gone out," said Gregory. "I say, can I have Markham to bowl at me when he's put the car away? I've got a new shot, and I want to see what it's like against real bowling."

"You'd better ask Markham," said Philip. "I don't mind, if he's free."

But Bob, it appeared, had to take the car to fetch Mrs. Blakeway back from a visit to a neighbour. Philip, anxious to improve relations, said, "All right, Gregory. I'll come and bowl at you if you'll give me time to change." It was a thing he had never done before, and an offer which, a few days ago, Gregory would have scornfully rejected.

"All right," said Gregory. "But I don't suppose you're much good, are you? Not like Markham anyway."

"Wait till I change, and we'll see," said Philip.

Half an hour later he sent down his first ball to Gregory at the nets which Markham and the boy had rigged up beside the tennis lawn. He was utterly out of practice, for it was a good many years since he had played a game of cricket. His first few balls lacked both length and straightness, and Gregory either lammed them contemptuously or let them go by. But after the first few Philip began to find his length and to remember the feel of the thing. He got in one of his old leg-breaks—he remembered one just like it had once taken a wicket in a critical school match. Gregory's middle stump was put badly out of the straight.

"I say," said Gregory, "was that a bump in the ground, or did you mean it?"

"Let's try again, and we'll see," said Philip.

The next ball did not hit the stumps, but it went dangerously near, and had Gregory all at sea. The next he just snicked, so that he would infallibly have been caught in the slips. The next laid out his off stump. The boy received these deliveries with growing bewilderment, for it was hard to get rid of the belief that each ball must be a lucky accident. The downfall of his off stump convinced him. "I say, you *can* bowl," he said.

"Used to," said Philip. "But it's a long while since I tried. I was a bit of a cricketer in the days of my youth."

"What did you play for?" Gregory asked.

"Sisbury," said Philip, before he thought what he was saying.

"I say. I never knew you were at Salisbury."

Philip cursed himself for an idiot. But it was too late to draw back. "We live and learn," he said. "You've got to watch these leg-breaks, Gregory. Watch 'em right up to the bat. If you slash away at them like that, you're bound to get either bowled or caught. Watch 'em, and only try to score when you get one that's short. That is, until you get your eye in, of course. Now, this is going to be an off-break, if I haven't forgotten how."

He had not. But Gregory was more at home with the off-breaks. Philip began to mix them up. He sent down one or two fast ones, and soon knocked the boy's middle stump out of the ground. But he was out of condition. He soon began to tire. "Hi," he said, "I'm not so young as I was, and I need a rest." He lay down full length on the grass and panted. Gregory came up to him, a new respect in his look.

"I suppose you were in the eleven at Salisbury," he said. "Why didn't you keep it up?"

"Not much cricket in—" Canada, Philip had nearly said. He was being quite criminally foolish to-day. "Mexico, and places like that. Besides, I'd plenty else to do."

"You ought to have," Gregory persisted. "You're better than Markham. I know how to play his stuff, though he gets me out sometimes. But he's jolly good too. I can't bowl for toffee. What are you like with the bat?"

"Fairish, I used to be. Heaven knows what I'm like now."

"Like to try? I could bowl at you. I can keep fairly straight, though that's about all. I'm a goodish field, though. I think a chap ought to be, don't you? It was bad fielding lost us the last Test. Shall I bowl at you a bit?"

"Too out of breath," said Philip. "And, as it is, I expect I shall be as stiff as Hades."

"But you'll give me some more practice sometime, won't you? I do want to get into the eleven. We play Sarbury, you know. If I do get in I shall tell the chaps you played for Sarbury. They're jolly good. They've beaten us three years running. Hallo, there's the car. I must go and tell Markham how you bowl. His nose'll be out of joint right and proper. I'd like to see you bowl at him. He's a lovely bat. Did you know he made a hundred for the village the other day? Fairly slogged 'em all over the place. At least, I don't mean he slogged, but he lammed 'em like billy-o. But I must run or he'll be gone."

Philip, sitting up on the grass, saw his wife get out of the car and disappear into the house, just before Gregory dashed up. There was an animated conversation between Markham and the boy, with many gestures on his part. He had taken his bat and was evidently illustrating how he had tried to play Philip's bowling, or perhaps the new stroke of which he had

spoken. Markham got down from the car, took the bat, and appeared to be demonstrating in his turn. Then Markham got into the car again, and drove it off in the direction of the garage, and Gregory came sauntering back.

"Feel like any more just yet?" he asked.

"No," said Philip. "I must go and have a word with your mother."

He walked slowly into the house and up to Hilda's room, where she was taking off her things. "Hallo, angel," she said. "No one told me you were back. Business all right, I hope. But I do wish you'd give it up. You know there's absolutely no need for you to go on slaving away."

"I don't," said Philip. "Sam does the slaving—what there is of it. There's not much, and he enjoys it. The thing we had to go up about turned out quite all right. But it was lucky I went. I'm not sure Sam would have known how to handle it by himself."

"Wasn't it funny, angel?" said Hilda. "I've been to see Mrs. Bennett-Ashworth. They were down at Brighton over the week-end, and she thought she caught sight of you there, in the distance. Perhaps you have a double. They say most people have, if they only knew."

Philip believed in economising lies. "Oh, I expect she did see me," he said. "The people we had that business with turned out to be staying at Brighton, and we had to run down to see them. It was jolly hot there."

"It's been quite hot enough here," said Hilda. "But it was nice at Bathease. I met such a pleasant woman over there too—a Mrs. Burton. I think Markham told you about her. I've asked her over to tea some day soon to meet you."

For a moment Philip said nothing. Then he said, "That will be jolly, darling. But of course I may have

to rush up to town at any moment—about this business. It isn't finally settled yet."

"I hate your beastly old business," said Hilda. "I shan't let you go."

Philip said nothing. At any rate it did not look as if Ann were due to-day. He would have warning, and time to make his escape.

CHAPTER X

A MOTOR ACCIDENT AND ITS SEQUEL

INSPECTOR LONGSIGHT, of Newbury, read through the brief report which had reached him from the police at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Captain Pollen, it appeared, had been interviewed immediately upon the arrival of his ship in the Tyne. He stated that he had no knowledge of Captain Jay's present whereabouts or recent movements, and had not so much as seen him for more than three months—in fact, since Captain Jay had accompanied him on a voyage from Bristol to Newcastle, by way of London. He had added, with embroidery which was not included in the police report, that he had not the smallest desire ever to set eyes on Captain Jay again, and the Newcastle inspector gathered that the two men must have quarrelled. He was prepared, if the Newbury police desired, to interview Pollen again, but he doubted if there was any more to be got out of him, unless indeed the Newbury authorities had any reason for suspecting foul play, in which Captain Pollen might be involved. The man had seemed to him to be speaking the truth, but of course he had no full knowledge of the circumstances. He proposed to take no further action except in response to a further request.

Inspector Longsight, after reading the report, felt that there was no case for troubling the Newcastle police any further. There was no reason at all for suspecting Captain Pollen's veracity, or for connecting him in any

way with Captain Jay's disappearance, and he would hardly have volunteered that remark about never wanting to see Jay again if he had had any reason for being afraid of the police. Accordingly, he wrote out a report simply stating that Captain Pollen had been seen, and appeared to know nothing of Captain Jay's recent doings, and this he forwarded to the constable at Bathease, with orders to call on Mrs. Burton and deliver the message.

Therefore, the following morning the local constable knocked at Mrs. Markham's front door and asked to see Mrs. Burton. Ann, when she had heard what he had to say, wanted of course to know what action the police proposed to take next. But on this point the constable had no instructions, for in fact the police proposed to do nothing at all. Ann told him she thought they ought to pursue the matter further, and more energetically, but he only said "Yes, ma'am" in the woodenest manner, without offering any suggestion; and Ann, when she found there was nothing to be got out of him, let him go away.

She had, however, no intention of letting matters rest there, though she had not the least idea what to do. After talking things over with Mrs. Markham, she took a bus into Newbury, and went to the police station, where she asked to see Inspector Longsight. The inspector, however, was out, and not expected back at the station till the following day, and Ann did not feel like laying her case before the station sergeant, who seemed never to have heard of Captain Jay, and to be eager to be rid of her—as indeed he was, for it was market day, and he was busy.

Not knowing what to do, she wandered out into the street, gazed at the incredibly ugly statue of Queen Victoria which presides over the little town, walked aimlessly up a couple of streets, and found herself near the station. At that point a car came out of the station

approach, driven rather fast, and Ann, not seeing it, stepped off the pavement right in front of it. The driver, with great presence of mind, swerved instantly, and pulled up, but not before the car had caught Ann a glancing blow which knocked her down.

She was not badly hurt, only dazed and shaken, and she was already scrambling to her feet when the driver of the car came up. A little crowd was already beginning to collect. The driver proved to be a man of middle age, very quick and abrupt in his movements, with one of those "God bless my soul" manners that are almost too military to be true. He fussed around her, hoping she was not seriously hurt, and making inarticulate noises. A policeman came up and saluted him with respect.

"It was all my fault," said Ann. "I wasn't looking where I was going."

The driver of the car did not deny this, for it was obviously true. The accident had not been his fault, even in the smallest degree. Indeed, but for his very prompt swerve, it would certainly have been a far more serious affair. But he asked her, with solicitude, whether she would like him to drive her to a doctor, in order to make sure of the extent of the damage.

Ann said, "Oh, no. There's not the smallest need of that. I shall be quite all right soon. It's only a few bruises. And I feel rather faint."

Instantly the driver whipped a flask out of his pocket, removed the metal cup from the bottom, poured out a stiff dram and offered it to her. Ann drank a little and choked. She handed it back. The driver stood holding it till she recovered and then proffered it again. Ann waved it away. He stared at it for a moment, then muttered, "Pity to waste good stuff," drained it off, and returned the flask to his pocket after replacing the cup. "At all events," he said, "you must allow me to drive you home. Where do you live?"

"Bathease," said Ann. "I came in by the bus."

This was rather further than the other had bargained for, but it would not make him seriously late home after all. "Get in, and I'll take you," he said. He turned to the policeman, who was hovering round doubtfully, note-book in hand. "That's all right, Peterson. No need to make any report, I think, unless I tell you later."

The policeman shut his note-book and saluted, and as the driver helped Ann into his car, the little crowd began to melt away. It had been pleasantly excited by the incident, for many of those present knew the driver of the car by sight, and it is not every day one can see the Chief Constable of the county involved in a motor accident, however slight.

Ann was in the front seat, beside the Chief Constable. "I hope you're feeling better, my dear," he said, as he started the car, for he held the view that most women were soothed by being addressed as "my dear," though it usually had the opposite effect on his wife, a certain Mrs. Welsh who was rather a celebrity in those parts. "My name, by the way, is Colonel Welsh, and I happen to be the Chief Constable here. That's why I stopped that policeman from taking notes, but, of course, if you want to put in a claim of any sort, we can always rig up a report."

"Oh, no," said Ann. "I'm not really hurt, and it was entirely my fault."

"To be quite honest, my dear, so it was," said Colonel Welsh, "and I'm glad it was no worse. Pretty place, Bathease. D'you live there?"

"No," said Ann. "I come from Canada, really. But I'm staying there at present, with a Mrs. Markham."

"Know Mrs. Markham," barked the colonel. "Very nice little woman too. Had to see her a while ago about a drunken old reprobate she had staying with her. Sort of fellow that's always getting into trouble. . . ."

"I . . . I'm afraid you must mean my father," said Ann. "It was about him that I came here to-day, to see Inspector Longsight."

"God bless my soul," said the colonel. "Sorry I spoke. And what has the . . . I mean what has your father been up to now?"

"He hasn't been up to anything, as far as I know," Ann answered. "He's disappeared. Inspector Longsight has been trying to trace him for me."

Colonel Welsh, who was always gallant, suppressed an inclination to suggest that, from what he knew of Captain Jay, this appeared to be an error of judgment, because losing a father of that sort could be reasonably regarded as a stroke of luck. Instead he heard himself saying, "I hope you are well on the way to finding him, Miss . . ."

"Mrs. Burton," Ann replied. "I'm afraid Inspector Longsight hasn't really been much help. Of course, I suppose it isn't his fault."

"If I can be any help," said the colonel.

The whole story then tumbled out. Ann had badly wanted some one further to consult, and the Chief Constable seemed as if he had been sent by providence to aid her in her distress. Colonel Welsh was beautifully sympathetic, but it is not certain that he would have been flattered if he had known that Ann was mentally labelling him an "old dear."

It appeared that he could be of help. Before the car reached Bathease, the Chief Constable had committed himself to taking up the question of Captain Jay's disappearance with renewed energy. Captain Pollen, if he had left Newcastle, should certainly be interrogated again when he could be found either in London or Bristol, and no stone should be left unturned to locate the missing parent of the charming lady who sat beside him. For Colonel Welsh had not merely a good heart, but one highly susceptible to feminine charms, and

taken in the right mood he would promise almost anything to any woman who was not positively ugly. Ann, despite her forty-three years, was certainly not ugly, and, luckily for her, Colonel Welsh definitely preferred the mature.

The car reached Bathease and drew up, at Ann's direction, before Mrs. Markham's front gate. The old woman was in the garden, as usual, and she dropped a curtsey when she saw the Chief Constable.

"How do, ma'am," said Colonel Welsh. "I've just been promising Mrs. Burton we'll move heaven and earth to find her father for her. Bit different from the last time, eh?" The Chief Constable chuckled. "But it's the least I can do, after knocking a lady over in the road."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Markham. "I do hope you aren't hurt."

"It was my fault," said Ann again. "I'm extraordinarily grateful to you, Colonel Welsh. Colonel Welsh has been wonderfully kind," she added, to Mrs. Markham.

"Nonsense, Mrs. Burton. Only my job," said the colonel. "Succouring damsels in distress. What else are we policemen for?"

"But I'm not a damsel," said Ann. "I've got a grown-up son."

"Damsel is as damsel looks, ma'am," said the colonel gallantly, turning to Mrs. Markham. "Don't you agree?"

"I don't like the way they look nowadays—hussies," said Mrs. Markham, for Colonel Welsh had hit on her one intolerant spot.

"Quite right, ma'am. Give me the old rosy, kissable kind, that don't come off on your mouth," said the colonel. "You cheer up, Mrs. Burton, and we'll find your father for you in a brace of shakes. Well, I must be getting along, or my wife'll be kicking up the deuce

of a row. I do hope you'll be all right, Mrs. Burton. Afraid you got a nasty turn."

"Perfectly all right," said Ann. "It's only a bruise or two—far less than I deserve."

So it happened that Inspector Longsight, after dismissing the affairs of Captain Jay from his mind, was firmly recalled to them by the Chief Constable on the following morning. Colonel Welsh read for himself the report from the Newcastle police and expressed himself as entirely unsatisfied. He was quite convinced that this Captain Pollen knew far more of the affair than he had admitted, and that if he were given a good fright he could be persuaded to throw far more light on Captain Jay's disappearance. Why, the fellow might have murdered Jay, and no one any the wiser. The first step was obviously to send a wire to the Newcastle police, asking them to interrogate Captain Pollen again. But they must set other agencies in motion as well. Why hadn't he thought of asking Mrs. Burton for a photograph of the missing man, which could be reproduced officially in the bulletin that went round to all stations? Then Scotland Yard and the Bristol police must be asked if they knew anything to Captain Pollen's disadvantage. And inquiries must be set on foot at once, in case any man resembling Captain Jay had been admitted to a hospital, or died in an accident, or anything of that sort. There were endless things to be done, and Inspector Longsight got thoroughly rated for not having done them all long before, after Ann Burton's original invocation of the police. Colonel Welsh swept through the Newbury police station like a whirlwind, disorganising all the routine and leaving a trail of deflated and angry subordinates behind him.

"The colonel's in one of his tantrums again," Sergeant Barter confided to Detective-Sergeant Moles. "Better mind your eye for a day or two, till he gets over it."

Inspector Longsight, who had no confidant, cursed the Chief Constable under his breath, but set out conscientiously to do his bidding. Telegrams were sent off to Bristol and Newcastle, and Colonel Welsh undertook to speak personally to Scotland Yard. For the colonel happened to have a special friend at the Yard in one Superintendent Wilson, who had picked him out of a nasty hole some years before by his unravelling of the strange case of the body—that of a clergyman—which had been found dead at the far end of the Chief Constable's own back garden.¹

It was late morning when Colonel Welsh at last got through to Superintendent Henry Wilson at his office. There was a man missing, a Captain John Jay, who must be traced at all costs. A fellow called Captain Pollen, who haunted the "Goat and Compasses" in Limehouse when he was in London, but lived in Bristol, was strongly suspected of knowing more than he was willing to say. Welsh wanted Scotland Yard to see if they had any information about either Jay or Pollen in their books, and especially to pick up anything they could about Pollen.

The Chief Constable was always bad at explaining things, especially over the telephone, and Wilson had much ado to get the story clear. He demanded fuller details in writing, and especially a photograph of the missing man. But he promised at once to make inquiries in order to see if either Jay or Pollen was known, under his own name, to the Metropolitan Police, and to send a man down to Limehouse in order to see if he could pick up any further information.

Having secured Wilson's promise, and badgered his subordinates nearly out of their wits, Colonel Welsh felt that honour was satisfied for the time being, and adjourned to the Constitutional Club for lunch. There

¹ See *The Corpse in the Chief Constable's Garden* (originally published as *Corpse in Canonicals*).

he ran into an old crony, Colonel Martindale, who was chairman of the county bench of magistrates. Martindale, as it happened, was lunching with Philip Blakeway, and at Martindale's invitation, Welsh joined their table, and was introduced to Philip, whom he had not previously met.

Colonel Welsh was still full of his case, and the whole affair was recited with gusto over lunch, from the moment when he had knocked Ann Burton down to what he had said to Inspector Longsight just before coming away to lunch. It was made plain to his hearers that the Chief Constable of the county meant to discover Captain John Jay, alive or dead, even if it meant moving heaven and earth to do it. "Though, between ourselves," Colonel Welsh confided, "the fellow's an infernal old scamp, and I should say he was a thoroughly good riddance from every point of view. Still, I can't have people disappearing without any explanation in my county, leaving nice little women wondering what the devil has happened to them. Have to clear these things up, for the honour of the Force, don't you know. Can't have untidy ends left lying about. Never do, what!" An observation which any one privileged to inspect Colonel Welsh's study, or to look into the drawers in which he kept his clothes, might have been pardoned for smiling at somewhat sardonically.

Philip listened uneasily, trying to look rather bored, while the Chief Constable held forth. Really, who would have supposed that so many people would have been stimulated to activity by the disappearance of Captain Jay? In Philip's opinion, if the world had been wise, it would have heaved a sigh of relief when the captain vanished, and would have refrained from asking inconvenient questions. But now the hunt seemed to be up with a vengeance; and Philip supposed that, if they went on at this rate, they were

bound before long to identify Captain Jay with the unknown man who had met his death at Sun House. That would be awkward, but it might not be fatal, if he could avoid coming face to face with Ann Burton—for, apart from her, was there likely to be anything the police could find that would reveal a connection between him and the dead man? Philip did not think there was. But what if they exhumed the body and held a fresh inquest, to which both he and Ann Burton might be summoned? Did the law allow that to be done? Philip simply did not know, but it seemed to him a most unpleasant possibility. He was coming more and more to feel that the only sensible course was to make promptly for somewhere abroad until the whole affair had time to blow over. If he did that, he would at least escape the danger of coming face to face with Ann, and that was, he thought, the only really serious danger. Of course, he would have to persuade Sam Fowler to come too, whatever might happen to the business, for it would be equally disastrous for him and Ann to meet. The real difficulty would be to persuade Hilda, for she hated going abroad at any time, and she would be strongly opposed to his going without her, especially as they had a whole string of engagements already fixed up in England for September.

Philip Blakeway really felt himself a very ill-used man. Why on earth couldn't these muddlers let Captain John Jay rest quietly in his grave? No one had shown much sign of wanting him while he was alive, but now that he was dead—well, he might have been Ramsay MacDonald and Marcus Aurelius rolled into one.

CHAPTER XI

A STRENUOUS MORNING AT LAMBOURN

SHEILA TREFUSIS came back from her visit to London, to find the atmosphere of the household at Lambourn greatly changed. There were more visitors in the house now, including a new friend of Sheila's, who had motored her down from London (so that there had been no opportunity for further passages with Bob Markham on the way), and he was staying on at least for a few days. His name was Roy Robinson—which began well but ended badly, for Sheila considered that a change of name from Trefusis to Robinson would be a little bit too thick for her taste. However, the mere fact that she considered the question in this light showed that she and Roy had been moving pretty fast, if not actually exceeding the speed limit. That Roy, with his noisy sports car, had undoubtedly done on the way down, and he had rejected her demands to be allowed to drive in a thoroughly he-mannish fashion which endeared him the more. Bob Markham need not have worried about Sheila's return, for she was no longer bored, having for the time at any rate other fish to fry.

Sheila was not, however, too preoccupied with her own affairs to observe the extraordinary change in the relations between her brother and her stepfather. As she and Roy Robinson came hurtling up the drive, the first thing she saw was Gregory at the cricket nets, being bowled to by no less a person than Philip. She heard cheery interchanges of talk when the car had stopped, as she and Roy got out and went into the house, and she was perplexed, for her brother's rooted dislike of his stepfather had seemed far too strong to be torn up in a few days. Sheila made up her mind to discover promptly what had happened. She at any

rate saw no reason to modify her view that Philip was a worm of the first water.

Hilda Blakeway was in the little room just beside the front door, arranging flowers. Sheila introduced Roy to her mother, and there was the usual exchange of banalities. "Where's everybody?" Sheila asked. "I thought you had quite a crowd down. I saw Gregory and . . . some one else playing cricket at the nets, but there was no one else in view."

"They're mostly gone for a walk," said her mother. "I do hope Philip won't tire himself bowling. I told him to get Markham to relieve him, but Gregory so much prefers Philip. It's so nice the way those two are getting on."

"Gregory never used to be able to stick him," said Sheila bluntly.

"My dear, I always knew they would get to understand each other better one of these days. I'm so delighted they have at last, although I don't want Philip to overtire himself. You must make friends with him too, Sheila dear, now Gregory has."

"Damned if I do," said Sheila, making a face. "Come on, Roy boy, let's play tennis."

"Too hot," said Roy. "I want a long drink, and then I'm going to lie down and go to sleep."

"Pig," said Sheila. "You can have your drink, but then you're going to play tennis with me."

"I'll take the drink and then we'll see," said Roy, grinning. "Got a bathing pool here? That's more like it."

"All right," said Sheila. "But you're to play tennis when you've bathed."

"Sufficient unto the minute—— Where's that drink?"

Hilda sighed and went on arranging her flowers. Of course, it was nice to be young and fresh, but in these days weren't the young just a trifle too fresh? However, one had to move with the times. Thank heaven, Philip

was old-fashioned. He never drank cocktails, or talked slang, or behaved as if he thought being rude was the better part of the gentle art of deportment. Philip was a dear, but how hot he must be, if he was still bowling at Gregory out there in the torrid heat.

At that moment Philip came in, looking like a dish-cloth that has just been imperfectly wrung out. "Angel, how frightfully tired you must be," said Hilda. "You don't know how happy it makes me." She saw that her remarks lacked sequence. "I mean, of course, you and Gregory being such friends."

"Ah, friendship is a noble thing," Philip quoted. "It also leads to the immediate necessity of a bath. Markham's taken over now. Darling, d'you happen to know any way one can make Gregory tired?"

"The poor boy's really rather delicate," said Hilda. "He quite often says he's tired."

"Yes, when he wants to get out of doing something," said Philip. "I don't mean that sort of being tired. I meant this sort," he indicated his own bedraggled person with a gesture. "Well, a-bathing we will go."

Hilda's eyes followed him lovingly. The telephone bell rang. She heard a male voice—one of the servants—answering. "I will go and inquire, madam," she overheard.

Jephson came to the door. "Mrs. Welsh on the telephone, madam. She wants to know if it would be quite convenient if she and Colonel Welsh were to come over this afternoon to tea. And they have a gentleman staying with them, and may they bring him too? And I forgot to tell you, madam, Mr. Fowler telephoned earlier, when you were out, to say he would be down to lunch."

"I'll come, Jephson." Hilda went to the telephone, and heard Mrs. Welsh's resonant voice at the other end. "Of course, we shall be delighted to have you," she said. "We're not a very large party. Yes, do bring your visitor. Do I know him?"

"No," came the answer. "I don't think you've met. But he's such a charming man—and so distinguished. He's Henry Wilson—*the* Henry Wilson, of Scotland Yard. . . . Yes, of course, the man who found out all about that dreadful Mr. Smith.¹ He'll be delighted to meet you, and I'm sure you will like him. I feel quite certain he and Mr. Blakeway have a great deal in common. So good of you, dear. We'll be over quite early. Harry Wilson's due to arrive here for lunch."

Hilda replaced the receiver. Mrs. Welsh was a woman she could not abide, though she liked the Chief Constable, with his bluff manners and his obvious lack of guile. As for this detective . . . Hilda had always supposed that detectives were not quite "gentlemen," and she had never met one before in the circles in which she moved. But she had heard that Superintendent Wilson was a very specially distinguished detective, so perhaps he was different. In any case, it was only for tea, and that wasn't like dinner. Yes, one must be thankful for small mercies. Mrs. Welsh was the sort of woman who was quite capable of inviting herself and her entire household out to dinner if something had gone wrong with her own domestic arrangements.

Jephson was still in the hall. "Oh, Jephson," she said, "if you see Mr. Blakeway will you tell him the Chief Constable is coming over this afternoon, and he's bringing a man from Scotland Yard with him. And, if he doesn't know already, tell him Mr. Fowler will be here to lunch." Hilda wandered out into the garden. At the cricket nets, Bob Markham was bowling indefatigably. She strolled towards them.

"Gregory, dear, I'm sure you must be tired out. Your father has come in like a limp rag, and gone to have a bath. It's quite time you stopped and had a rest."

A week ago, if Hilda had referred to Philip as "father,"

¹ See *The Corpse in the Chief Constable's Garden*.

Gregory would have gone off the deep end. But now he did not appear even to notice. "Rubbish, mother," he said. "I'm not a bit tired. I could go on like this all day. Nor's Markham. Are you, Bob?"

Hilda frowned. She did not like the idea of Gregory addressing Markham by his Christian name—which was also something new. But now was not the moment for taking up that point. "You really ought to rest," she reiterated.

Gregory took no notice. "Come on, Bob," he said. "Give us another fast one on the leg stump if you can." Hilda gave it up.

She saw Sheila and her new friend, both in bathing costumes, emerge from the house. Sheila sprinted. "This way," she said. "Race you." They were off.

Hilda sighed. Every one seemed to be dreadfully energetic for this hot morning. Still, Roy Robinson looked quite the right sort. She must find out from Sheila who he was. Robinson was such a dreadfully common name. Though there were some quite good families called Robinson too. Wasn't that the name of the Marquis of somewhere? Perhaps this Roy . . . Hilda was day-dreaming.

Philip came downstairs from his bath, stiff but refreshed. There seemed to be no one about. He sauntered to the door, and saw the cricket still in progress on the lawn, and, in the farther distance, the returning party of walkers coming up the drive. He turned back into the house, to confront Jephson.

"Please, sir. I was to tell you that Mr. Fowler rang up to say he would be down to lunch."

"Good," said Philip. Sam Fowler could have a turn at bowling to Gregory this afternoon. He too had been quite a good cricketer in the old days.

"And the Chief Constable is coming over this afternoon, sir, and he's bringing a man from Scotland Yard."

Philip's heart seemed to stop beating. He went cold

all over. He wondered how much of his consternation showed plainly in his face.

"Oh," he said. "Thank you, Jephson." He fled precipitately upstairs, to avoid meeting the returning walkers. Jephson looked after him with a puzzled air. He did not know what to make of that sudden change of countenance. He retired down the hall, thinking deeply and shaking his head.

CHAPTER XII

CAT AND MOUSE?

HILDA found Philip upstairs in his own room. He complained that he had a headache, and she at once put it down to his having over-exerted himself in playing with Gregory. "Sheila's back," she said. "Did you see her? She's brought a new young man. His name's Robinson, but he seems to be quite nice. She met him while she was in London, and he motored her down. He's staying. And did Jephson tell you Sam Fowler will be here to lunch?"

"Yes," said Philip.

"Oh, and Mrs. Welsh 'phoned up to ask if she might come over this afternoon. She's bringing the colonel, of course, and they've got a man staying there, and she wants to bring him too. He's that detective who cleared up the Smith case—you know, when Colonel Welsh found the body lying in his garden—but I suppose he may be quite presentable. It's not as if he was an ordinary detective. Of course, I can't abide that woman, but Colonel Welsh is nice, and I didn't see how to stop her coming."

Philip was conscious of a great relief. So the visit of the Chief Constable, accompanied by a man from Scotland Yard, was in reality no more than an ordinary friendly call, and he had suffered all his fears for nothing. Or hadn't he? Did Mrs. Welsh's invitation of herself

and her visitor really cover a visit of espionage by the famous detective? More than espionage it could hardly be, and it might be nothing but an afternoon call. But it would be well to be on his guard and to warn Sam as well, for, with these detective fellows, you never could tell. It would be just like this one to use the ineffable Mrs. Welsh as a means of gaining an entry to the house.

All the same, Philip was more than half reassured, though he had still plenty to worry about quite apart from the detective's impending visit. "I won't come down just yet," he said, "but if I rest a bit I shall be perfectly all right for lunch. Send Sam up to see me if he gets in before then. As for Gregory, I never knew the boy had so much stamina. He's shaping quite decently as a bat too, though he's no idea of bowling."

"I don't think he ought to call Markham by his Christian name," said Hilda.

"Does he?" Philip asked. "After all, why shouldn't he? Bob Markham's a very nice young fellow."

"But it gets the boy into bad ways, Philip. Of course, Markham's an excellent servant, but it doesn't do to let the children get too friendly with the servants, does it? I wish you'd speak to Gregory. He seems to take so much notice of you now."

"Not me," said Philip. "Even if Sheila were to start calling Markham Bob, I shouldn't interfere."

"As if she would ever do such a thing," said Sheila's mother.

"Again, why not? Bob's good-looking, and he's a damn sight nicer than most of the cubs she does call by their Christian names."

"Don't talk like a Socialist, Philip. I don't like it."

Philip laughed. "Oh, I'm no Socialist," he said. "I'm much too fond of my own comfort. But Bob Markham's a good sort. Put him in a boiled shirt and sit him down to dinner with the others, and you'd never take him for a chauffeur."

"Talking of Markham reminds me, Philip. I must ask Mrs. Burton over here one day soon. Not while we've got all these people, of course. But they'll all be gone by Tuesday. I thought of getting her over on Tuesday afternoon. How would that suit you?"

Philip temporised. "I really don't know, darling, till I've seen Sam. Might have to rush up to town again any moment. But you invite her for then, and I'll be here if I can. It'll probably be all right for me."

"I thought she was such a nice woman, angel. There is something rather pathetic about her. I believe she became a widow a great many years ago. She ought to have married again, like me. But perhaps she couldn't find a nice, satisfying husband like you, Philip."

"Ask her for Tuesday," said Philip. "Markham can fetch her, I suppose?"

"Of course. Oh, here you are, Mr. Fowler"—for Sam had appeared at the door. "Had a nice run down?"

"All rightish! Got quite a crowd, I see? Who's the bloke in the bathing costume? He seems to be Sheila's property."

"Beyond the fact that his name is Roy Robinson, I really can't tell you," said Hilda. "Sheila acquired him in London. He seems quite pleasant."

Sam Fowler whistled softly. "Shucks!" he said. "Not *the* Roy Robinson, by any chance?"

"Who *is* *the* Roy Robinson, Mr. Fowler?"

"Old Dardwell's son. You know, the potted meat bloke. He bought his peerage last Honours List. Worth millions, and all that. Roy's his only son, and he goes the pace. There's a story about old Dardwell, by the way. You know he lisps."

"I didn't," said Hilda, "but go on."

"Well, he married three times, and they said it was the three w's. The first time he mawwied, he mawwied for the woman, but she deceived him. The second time

he mawwied for wealth, and she died. The third time he mawwied for wank, and she's his Catherine Parr. Young Roy Robinson'll be rolling when his father dies. He's the only son, though there are battalions of daughters. Tell Sheila to nail him, if he's the chap she has in tow."

"I should never advise Sheila to marry except for love," said Hilda.

"Quite right too," said Sam, "as long as she minds out what she loves."

"Sheila's very particular."

"So I've noticed," said Sam. "She don't like me one little bit. Or you, Philip."

"Well, I must be moving," said Hilda. "We can't both leave our guests in the lurch. But mind, Mr. Fowler, I absolutely forbid you to drag Philip off again with you to London—or Brighton. I won't have it." Hilda sailed away upon her household duties.

"How the hell'd she know we went to Brighton?" Sam asked.

"I told her," said Philip. "Some harridan down here saw me there, so I said we'd had to run down there on business. And, by the way, hold yourself ready for a bit more good stout lying. Ann's being asked to tea here on Tuesday, so I've got to get out of the way. But don't say anything about it yet, till it's all fixed up, or Hilda'll change the day. We shall have to stage a sudden business crisis at the last moment."

"Bit of a facer, Ann being so near," said Sam.

"It is, but that's not all. The Chief Constable is coming over here this afternoon, and he's bringing a Scotland Yard man with him. Man named Wilson."

Sam whistled. "I say, not *the* Wilson?"

"I gather he's the big pot. He's a friend of the Welshes. That's the Chief Constable. Mrs. Welsh rang up as if it was just a friendly visit, and merely a chance their having this detective staying with them. May

be only that, too, but you never know. I was in a bit of a stew when I heard who was coming."

"Hm," said Sam. "I can't say I like the look of it. Still, the Welshes are friends of yours, aren't they?" And if this Wilson's a friend of theirs . . . I suppose it may be all right."

"Let's hope it is," said Philip. "But I thought I'd better have a word with you, so that you'd be on the look out. I can't really see how the Yard can have got on to me, unless they smelt a rat about that affair at Sun House, or the police have really been working away at it all the time."

"I don't think so," said Sam slowly. "Still, I'll be damned careful. Detectives always make my flesh creep; don't they yours?"

"So long as you keep your face straight, and watch what you're saying, I don't see how any harm can come of it," said Philip.

"Any other fresh news about—that business, Phil?" Sam asked.

"Only that the police are taking up the hunt for old Jay again—more in earnest this time, I'm afraid. I should say they're bound to find out sooner or later what happened to him."

"And then?" Sam asked.

"Why, if only I can keep out of Ann's way, and you too, I don't see there's any real danger. Only, of course, if once Ann sees either of us, it's all absolutely the end of everything. So we've got to be jolly careful, both of us, but especially me."

"It's rotten luck, Ann turning up like this," said Sam. "She might have stayed put over in Canada, where she wasn't in anybody's way."

"It's just hell," said Philip simply. "All the more because I liked Ann a long sight better'n I've ever liked any one since."

"Including Hilda?" Sam inquired.

"Hilda? Lord, yes," said Philip. "Hilda's all right in her way, but Ann . . . I wonder what she's like after twenty years, old chap."

"Shut up, Phil," Sam said. "Don't you start being sentimental at your time of life. It ain't done, my boy."

"I know it isn't—but all the same—you used to be fond of Ann, Sam."

"Hellish," said Sam. "Don't do it, Phil. You know I'd have married Ann like a shot any time, if she'd have had me."

"Whew . . ." said Philip. "Long time ago it all seems, Sam."

"Seems like yesterday to me, old chap—kind of yesterday when every day's ten thousand years."

"Same thing," said Philip. He looked at his watch. "Hallo, lunch time. Let's go and face the music. But not a word about my having to buzz off on business till I give the word. Got that, Sam?"

"Right-o," said Sam. "Keep your pecker up, old chap." He squeezed Philip's arm affectionately as they left the room and set out to rejoin the rest of the party.

"A-ash Mr. Blakeway," said Mrs. Welsh in her high-pitched, impetuous tones. "I've been wanting to introduce Mr. Wilson to you all the afternoon, only you've always seemed to be somewhere else. Mr. Wilson comes from Scotland Yard, you know. He's a terribly great person really—only just occasionally he spares me a week-end. I'm sure you must have heard how he—
There is no saying how long she would have gone on, had not Henry Wilson struck in at this point.

"Mrs. Welsh has a most exaggerated idea of my importance," he said. "I have heard quite a lot of you, Mr. Blakeway, from our mutual friend, Robert Semple. He is as fond of singing your praises as Mrs. Welsh is of singing mine."

Philip wondered whether the very sharp pair of eyes

that was looking into his with seeming friendliness really belonged to an enemy who had sought this introduction solely for the sake of hunting him down. Of course, that was just how a man like Wilson would behave, if he were hot on the trail. On the other hand, it was also just how he would behave, if he had no *arrière pensée* at all in his mind. One just couldn't tell, but that was a sufficient reason for being careful. He smiled back.

"I know you by reputation, of course," he said, "but I'd no idea Bob Semple was a friend of yours. Funny I've never run across you, down at his place."

"As a matter of fact I've never been there," said Wilson. "Semple and I are friends, but I shouldn't get on with his friends, or he with mine, so we keep our friendship purely personal. Really, you know, I'm a bit of a fish out of water here this afternoon. Parties—even afternoon parties without formalities—are'n't much in my line. Generally, I only go to them when I've got to, and this is quite an exception. Why, you won't need to ask, since you know Mrs. Welsh. Every one always has to do what she tells them, and I gave up trying to resist her long ago."

Philip thought, "This fellow's so determined to explain his presence here this afternoon that he must have come on business, and the business is sure to be me." The thought put him on his mettle. He would take the bull by the horns and, with a fine mixing of metaphors, see if the famous detective rose to the bait.

"I'm surprised Mrs. Welsh didn't take you over to Bathease, instead of bringing you here," he said. "I understand they have had a mysterious disappearance in those parts."

"Oh, Captain Jay, you mean," said Wilson lightly. "Yes, Colonel Welsh has been on to me about that. Did you know the man, by the way? I hear rather mixed accounts of him."

"Didn't know him at all," said Philip. "I only

know about the case because he happened to be lodging with my chauffeur's mother, so my man consulted me about it. I said I thought the old chap had probably gone off on his own, and would turn up again in his own good time, but I gather Colonel Welsh has quite made up his mind there's some mystery about it."

"Between ourselves," said Wilson, "I shouldn't be surprised if you're right. But now that his daughter has gone to the police about it, of course they are bound to investigate."

"You've no news yet, then?" Philip asked. "At least, so I gather, from the way you speak of it."

"You're quite right. We've no news yet. There's a man called Captain Pollen we are on the look out for, in case he really knows anything, though he says he doesn't. But I only got a photograph of the missing man from Mrs. Burton—that's his daughter's name—as recently as yesterday, and he was being looked up in our files when I came away. If we have any record of him at the Yard, it's bound to have been found by now. But, of course, the odds are that we haven't. He seems to have been a bit of an old rip, but there's no reason for supposing he was a criminal. If he wasn't, we should have no record of him, unless he's been found dead, or wandering after losing his memory, or something of that sort. It's not easy to trace a man who's simply missing, Mr. Blakeway, if he isn't a criminal, and doesn't want to be found. Why, there are hundreds of people living in England to-day who have just vanished from one place—some for one reason and some for another—and started out under new names somewhere else. If we had to keep track of them all we should have our hands full. Fortunately, in most cases we aren't concerned. It's no crime for a man to vanish, or make use of a name that doesn't belong to him, unless he's committed a crime, or is using the new name for false pretences of some sort."

"Then you've no theory about Jay?"

"None at all, at present. I dislike making bricks without straw. All I know so far is that a man has disappeared. Why he has done so, or what happened to him, I simply don't know at all. I could make a half a hundred guesses, but what would be the use of that, when I've no means of determining whether one is more correct than another?"

"What you say sounds most reassuringly prudent," said Philip. "In the detective stories the great detective always has a full-blown theory as soon as he sets eyes on the corpse."

Wilson laughed. "But I don't even know there is a corpse to set eyes on," he said. "Besides, I'm not either Holmes or Thorndyke. I neither work nor believe in miracles. I simply plod along till something turns up. It's wonderful how often it does. Now, in the case of Captain Jay, where are we? With nothing to go on, you might say. But that's not quite so. In the first place, people don't simply vanish into thin air. Some one sees them, even if it's only the murderer. If they stay alive, they can't isolate themselves from contact with human beings. Somebody goes on seeing them, and that always means somebody who may, voluntarily or involuntarily, give 'em away. Or, if they're dead, bodies have a way of turning up. Hiding a body, so that it doesn't ever turn up, is one of the hardest jobs on earth. Of course, if a missing man has managed to slip quietly abroad, with some one else's passport neatly doctored, before the hue and cry starts, tracing him may prove to be impossible. I'm not saying mere patience and routine will solve every case, but it's wonderful in how many cases they are effective in the end. If you ever want to commit murder, Mr. Blakeway, I advise you to remember that the most untrue proverb ever made is 'Dead men tell no tales.' In my experience, dead men are the most inveterate gossips of all. But

perhaps I'm boring you. I have a reputation for talking shop out of hours."

"Quite the contrary," said Philip. "So you think Captain Jay will be traced, even now?"

"Unless he went abroad right away," said Wilson. "And even then we shall probably find out why he went, if that's any consolation for not catching him."

"You make the police sound terribly efficient," said Philip. "I tremble in my shoes."

"The police *aren't* efficient," Wilson answered. "They're no more efficient than doctors, or lawyers, or bankers, or any other lot of pundits. But in spite of human frailty, I do think that the truth has a way of coming uncovered, if only the pure routine is reasonably well organised. If ever you have it in mind to commit a crime, Mr. Blakeway, my advice to you is, 'Think twice, and don't.'"

That conversation—and there was some more of it—left Philip as puzzled at the end as he had been when it began. On one interpretation, it was just chit-chat; on another it was full of sinister hints and menaces. But in either case Wilson seemed to have made no attempt to pump him. And as for Sam, it so happened that Sam never met the great detective at all. For Wilson did not stop very long, and Sam was down at the tennis courts all the time, and Wilson never went near them. If the Scotland Yard man was on Philip's trail, his only immediate object must have been to see his victim, and find out what manner of man he was. That would be bad enough, and Philip was inclined to take the gloomy view. But Sam Fowler, perhaps reassured because Wilson had shown no curiosity about him, held firmly to the idea that his coming to Lambourn had nothing at all to do with either Jay or Philip, but was merely what it seemed—Mrs. Welsh exhibiting her lion.

CHAPTER XIII

IDENTIFIED

"WHAT about that man that Newbury chap keeps bothering about?" Superintendent Burslem asked of Inspector Stoke. "Have you seen him again?"

"I tried, sir, but he's gone. They say he left for London in his ship just before we went after him."

"Good," said Burslem. "Then we needn't bother about him any more. I'll send Newbury a report to say there's nothing doing."

"That you, Wilson?" said Colonel Welsh over the 'phone to Scotland Yard. "Sorry to bother you when you've just got back. But we've had a report that that Captain Pollen's left Newcastle for London with his ship. Will you see somebody gets on to him at your end as soon as he arrives?"

Report from the Bristol police to the Chief Constable at Newbury. "In response to your request we have had careful inquiries made here. As we informed you previously, we have nothing definite against Captain Pollen on our files. His reputation here does not appear to be too good, but there is nothing to suggest any criminal activities—only some tendency to drunkenness and a reputation for closeness and ill-temper. As for his past, Captain Pollen appears to have been formerly resident in Canada, but to have settled in Bristol six years ago. He is owner as well as captain of his vessel, and is regularly engaged in the coasting trade. We have ascertained from the wife of his mate that Captain Jay made a voyage with him some months ago, but nothing seems to have been seen or heard of Jay in these parts more recently than that. Captain Pollen is at present away with his vessel, and no one appears to know when

he is expected back. Kindly notify us if you wish us to take any further action."

"What do we do next, Longsight?" Colonel Welsh inquired. "Must do something, don't you know. Nice little woman, that Mrs. Burton. Mustn't disappoint her, whatever we do."

"I don't think there's anything more we can do, sir, till we hear from London. They've got that photograph of Captain Jay now, and it's being reproduced for general circulation. And they will see this man Pollen as soon as he turns up. I think we've done all we can, sir." Privately, Inspector Longsight held that they had done much more than they really needed to do. But he was used to his superior's vagaries, and he felt sure Colonel Welsh's enthusiasm would soon begin to cool.

"I suppose you're right, Longsight. But let me know at once if any news comes in."

News did come in that afternoon. Scotland Yard reported that, with the aid of the photograph which the Newbury police had sent up, they had found no difficulty in identifying Captain Jay. He was identical with an unknown man who had been shot by accident in an affray while he was attempting burglary at a house in Hampstead. The dead man's portrait, taken after death, had been published in some of the papers at the time, and though it differed in certain respects from the photograph which the Newbury police had supplied, there was not much doubt concerning the identification. Apart from the resemblance, all the essential cephalic measurements were the same and there was a noticeable scar which came out in both of the photographs. Scotland Yard enclosed a report of the proceedings at the inquest on the unknown man, and would be glad to be of any further assistance, and

in any event to receive a report of any further action taken by the Newbury police.

Inspector Longsight, having read the report, turned to the enclosed account of the inquest. As he began to read it, his eyebrows went up with surprise, and he made a clucking noise with his tongue against his front teeth. What had caught his attention was that the burglary had taken place at the London residence of Mr. Philip Blakeway.

Longsight immediately rang up Colonel Welsh, who had gone home, and told his news. On hearing it, the Chief Constable at once said that he would come back to the office. But before that he had to make his excuses to Mrs. Welsh, with whom he had an assignation to help her do some pruning in the garden. "Very sorry, my dear," he said, "but I shall have to slip back to Newbury at once. Inspector Longsight wants me."

"Surely we can wait," Mrs. Welsh protested. "I must get that pruning done, and I simply can't manage it all alone."

"Important business. Most important," said the colonel. "They've found that Captain Jay."

"I don't see that that's important. I was always absolutely certain that he'd turn up. I told you you were making a fuss about nothing."

"That's all very well, my dear, but he hasn't turned up—not in that sense. He's dead and buried."

"In that case he's not in the least likely to run away," said Mrs. Welsh. But her curiosity had been aroused. "Where did they find him?"

Colonel Welsh told the story, as far as he knew it, including the fact that the dead man had been shot in attempting a burglary at Philip Blakeway's London house. "Of course, I suppose it's only a coincidence," he said.

What else could it be but a coincidence, Mrs. Welsh

wanted to know. There was nothing at all in the fact that Philip Blakeway and the burglar happened to have houses in the same county—twenty miles apart too. Besides, the whole thing had been cleared up at the inquest, hadn't it?

"I suppose you're right, my dear," said Colonel Welsh. "And now I shall have to go and explain to that nice little woman that her father was a burglar, and most likely she'll go into hysterics and refuse to believe it and make all sorts of fuss."

"Then you can let that Inspector Longsight tell her, or write," Mrs. Welsh suggested. "I'm sure there's no need for you to be bothered."

"Still, my dear, you see I must go into Newbury and see the report."

"I don't see the slightest necessity. To-morrow would do perfectly well. But if you must I suppose you must. Only you've got to get back to tea. There are people coming. The Blakeways are coming, as a matter of fact. So you can ask him all about his burglar when he comes."

So Colonel Welsh buzzed back to his office in his car, read the reports from Scotland Yard, and discussed things with Inspector Longsight for half an hour. In the end it was arranged that the Inspector should write to Ann Burton at once, asking her if she could make it convenient to call at the Newbury police station on the following afternoon. Colonel Welsh arranged to be there, and to see her personally. He told Longsight that he had Philip Blakeway coming to tea at his house. "Between ourselves," he said, "he's a bit of a friend of my wife's. Nothing against him, have we?"

Inspector Longsight was quite shocked. "Oh, no, sir, of course not," he said. "Mr. Blakeway is a very well-off gentleman, sir. He visits all the best people, though he hasn't lived in these parts very long. Only since he married Mrs. Trefusis."

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"Ain't always a guarantee, that sort of thing," said the Chief Constable sagely. "But of course there is nothing in this business to suggest anything against Blakeway."

"No, sir, nothing at all. We always thought Captain Jay was a bad lot, sir, after that trouble at Bathease, when he got drunk and smashed the Vicar's windows."

"Shouldn't have taken him for the burglar type, though, would you, Longsight? They generally need to keep sober."

"No, sir. I shouldn't think he was a regular burglar, or we shouldn't have been so free from that sort of thing in these parts, with him right on the spot. Might have been a sudden temptation, sir, while he was under the influence of drink."

"But why choose Blakeway's house? What was he doing in Hampstead, anyway? No, Longsight, there's more in it than that. You see, it says this man Jay called on Blakeway earlier in the day and asked him for money, and then came back and attempted to burgle the house when Blakeway refused. Blakeway says he'd never set eyes on the fellow before, but admits the fellow claimed to have met him. Looks as if he thought he had a grievance against Blakeway, though Blakeway didn't know him. We must ask Mrs. Burton if she knows Blakeway, Longsight. It's a queer business, however you look at it. Wants looking into." Colonel Welsh pulled out his watch. "My hat," he said, "I must be getting back, or my wife'll be raising Cain. I'll see Blakeway and put it to him. Let you know in the morning."

Philip and Hilda were already with Mrs. Welsh when the colonel got back. The younger people, it appeared, had not come over. Sheila Trefusis was off somewhere with Roy Robinson, and Gregory was playing in a village cricket match that evening. Mrs. Welsh was inclined to monopolise Philip, but after tea the colonel

managed to get him away to a quiet corner of the garden.

"Wanted a word with you, Blakeway," he said. "Most extraordinary thing happened. Scotland Yard sent it on to us this afternoon. You know that chap Jay we've been looking for for that nice little woman over at Bathease?"

Philip nodded. He had a shrewd idea, from Colonel Welsh's manner, of what was coming next.

"Most extraordinary thing," the colonel repeated. "D'you know, he turns out to be the identical fellow that tried to burgle your house at Hampstead."

Philip did his best to register surprise. "You don't say so," he said. "Well, that is the most remarkable thing, isn't it? Of course, they never did identify that chap. I say, though, I'm sorry for that daughter of his. My wife says she's a good sort. Asked her to our place to meet me, as a matter of fact."

Colonel Welsh wagged his head in sorrow. "Yes," he said, "I'm afraid it's bound to be a shock to that poor little lady, because I'm certain she hadn't the least idea that her father had been up to anything he shouldn't—except drinking. Of course, she knew the fellow drank like a whale."

"Well, luckily we aren't really responsible for our fathers' sins, in spite of the Scriptures," said Philip.

"No, but it's a queer business. What I can't make out, Blakeway, is why this fellow picked out your house to burgle."

"It always has to be somebody's house, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but Hampstead's a long way from here."

"If I took to burglary, I think I'd always choose places a good long way from where I lived. Far less likely to get caught that way, I should imagine."

"Hm, something in that. But it's a queer coincidence, your having another house quite near him all the time."

"Oh, I shouldn't think that was a coincidence. I

should suppose somebody down here told him about my Hampstead place, and he thought he'd have a crack at it. Probably Mrs. Markham, where he lodged. She's my chauffeur's mother, you know. Or Markham himself. I expect he met Jay."

"I say," said the Chief Constable, "you don't think your chauffeur was in it with Jay all the time? I must say, on the surface, it looks a bit like it."

"Don't believe it for a moment," said Philip, very positively. "I'd trust Markham with my last dollar. Besides, he wasn't in London when it happened. He was down here."

"P'raps you're right. But it wants looking into, all the same. This fellow called on you earlier in the afternoon, didn't he?"

"Yes, about six o'clock. As I told the police at the time, he claimed old acquaintance, in South America, and asked for money. Naturally, I didn't give him any. I should say it's a regular trick."

"You're absolutely sure, are you, you hadn't met him before?"

"My dear fellow, who could be? I'm absolutely certain I have no recollection of ever having met him. That's the most any one can say, isn't it?"

"Then how d'you account for his coming to call?"

"Well, at first I thought he might have been mistaking me for some one else. But now, especially after what you've told me, I fancy it's pretty clear what he wanted."

"How d'you mean?"

"Why, he came to have a look at the lie of the land—spy out the house, and all that. He was kept waiting some time in the morning-room before I saw him. At least, he was supposed to be in the morning-room, but I dare say he took his chance of snooping round a bit, so as to know his way about the place when he came back later."

"Yes, that would explain it," said the Chief Constable. "Sorry to have bothered you with all this, Blakeway, but I thought you ought to know what we'd found out. Did you say your wife had got that nice Mrs. Burton coming over to tea? Blest if I don't invite myself too."

"I'm sure we shall be delighted, colonel. Shall I have a word with my wife, or will you?"

"You do it, my dear chap, and 'phone me at the office." The colonel winked. "Otherwise my wife'll have to come too," he said.

"Right-o!" said Philip. "Very good of you to have told me all about it. Not that it matters much to me who the chap was, as I didn't know him from Adam. In fact, in some ways it'd be nicer not to know. One feels much more rotten about it, now that the chap's got a name, though it wasn't my fault his blasted revolver went off and did him in."

"Of course not. Not your fault at all, my dear fellow," said the colonel.

"Whatever have you two been talking about so earnestly all this time?" Mrs. Welsh inquired. "I suppose you've been telling Mr. Blakeway about that Captain Jay. What does it feel like to have shot a man, Mr. Blakeway? Of course, I know you didn't. I mean he really shot himself, and it was all an accident. But I suppose you do feel rather as if you had killed him, don't you? I'm sure I should."

"As you suggest, Mrs. Welsh," Philip answered, "my feelings get a bit mixed. I assure you it was not a pleasant experience."

"Horrid!" Mrs. Welsh shuddered. "But I do think it was brave of you, Mr. Blakeway—I mean, to go for the man instead of running away, when he had a revolver pointed at you, and you were unarmed."

"I'd a good heavy book," said Philip. "Jolly useful

things, books. I was thinking of fitting up burglar alarms, or buying a gun, but upon my word, Mrs. Welsh, I'll buy the *Encyclopædia Britannica* instead. Save a lot of trouble too. Only the very strong-minded can escape in these days without either the *Encyclopædia* or a vacuum cleaner. The weak-minded get landed with several of both."

"Yes, canvassers are rather dreadful," said Mrs. Welsh. "You feel so sorry for them, and some of them have such nice, tragic eyes. Quite like spaniels, I always think."

"The new art of salesmanship," Philip laughed. "It hurts me more than it hurts you. But we must be going, Mrs. Welsh. My wife's been catching my eye for quite ten minutes."

"What did Mr. Blakeway say when you told him about Captain Jay being his burglar?" Mrs. Welsh asked her husband when the visitors were gone. "I do think Mr. Blakeway's charming, don't you? Such nice eyes, and such an amusing talker. He has charming manners too. Only you quite monopolised him this afternoon."

"Blakeway's all right," said the colonel. "Decent fellow, and he's got his head screwed on the right way. You know this Jay lodged with that Mrs. Markham over at Bathease. Well, her son's the Blakeways' chauffeur, and Blakeway thinks Jay must have found out all about Sun House from one of them, and made up his mind to have a crack at it. I should say that's right. Jolly sensible suggestion. And he thinks Jay called on him earlier in the day in order to spy out the land, and all that. Probably that's right too. Clears the whole thing up. Oh, and when I said why pick a place so far off where he lived to burgle, Blakeway said that that was just what he'd do, if he ever turned burglar. Jolly good job he hasn't. He'd be too good

at it. Lucky for us, my dear, most of the criminals are mugs—at all events out in the country here. Of course, I suppose there are some clever crooks up in London."

"That dreadful Mr. Smith was clever enough," said Mrs. Welsh. "That reminds me. Does Harry know about the burglar being Captain Jay?"

"I should say so. It was the Yard sent the news through to us, though it didn't come from Harry Wilson personally."

"I should have thought he would have rung me up," said Mrs. Welsh. "He might have known how interested I should be."

"Or me," said the colonel.

"But perhaps he's away," Mrs. Welsh went on. "He said he might have to go out of town to-day on a case. I expect that's it."

Colonel Welsh considered that it was in any event most unlikely that Superintendent Wilson would have rung up Mrs. Welsh. But she liked cherishing these little fancies, and they did no harm. He had certainly no intention of contradicting her. Nor did he feel in any need of bothering Wilson over the affairs of Captain Jay. The whole thing seemed quite straightforward now. It was hardly worth while bothering to interview Captain Pollen, now that Jay had been found. The Chief Constable rang up Inspector Longsight at Newbury and told him of the purport of his conversation with Philip Blakeway. He ended by suggesting that, as everything now seemed to have been cleared up, they might as well countermand the request to the Metropolitan police to interview Pollen again.

Longsight was inclined to demur. But opposition was apt to make Colonel Welsh more obstinate. He definitely ordered the inspector to send word to London that there was no further need to bother about seeing Captain Pollen.

Inspector Longsight sighed, but he did not much

mind. After all, it meant less work. He wrote a chit to London, and went home to his scarlet runners, which were of far more interest to him just then than all the police cases in the world. Meanwhile, Colonel Welsh was helping his wife prune, for his hope that she would manage without him had not been fulfilled. Colonel Welsh hated gardening as much as Inspector Longsight loved it. On this point Mrs. Longsight, who was helping her husband weed, and found it made her back ache, shared the Chief Constable's view. Such is life.

"Oh, by the way, darling," said Philip to Hilda, "Colonel Welsh was saying he'd like to be asked to tea when your Mrs. Burton comes over. She seems to have fascinated him."

Hilda snorted. "I shan't ask him," she said. "That awful wife of his will certainly insist on coming too, and I simply won't have her in the house again. She was making eyes at every man she could see all the time she was here."

"Oh, Mrs. Welsh does no harm," said Philip. "How did you like her lion, darling?"

"He was really rather sweet, and quite a gentleman. Not a bit like my idea of a detective. I saw you having such a long talk with him, angel. What were you talking about?"

"He was advising me not to take to crime."

"Angel, how absurd!" said Hilda. "As if you would hurt a fly."

CHAPTER XIV

ANN HEARS THE NEWS

PHILIP had found a far better excuse than another sudden business engagement. "You must see, darling, I can't possibly meet a woman who's bound to think it was all my fault her father got shot when I was scuffling

with him, even if she doesn't say I potted him deliberately out of sheer lust for blood. By all means, let the woman come to tea. I'm going out. I've been wanting to run over to Southampton to see Jaggers about that consignment of basic slag, and this is just the chance. Mind if I ask Gregory if he'd like to run over with me?"

"I promised to send Markham over to fetch Mrs. Burton."

"That's all right. We shan't need him. I'll go in the Talbot."

"I don't like every one being out except me when Mrs. Burton comes. It looks so rude."

"What about Sheila? Make her stay."

Hilda Blakeway lifted helpless hands. "Angel, as if she would. In any case, they've gone off for the day already. I haven't had a chance of telling you, Philip, he is *the* Roy Robinson. I got it out of him without seeming to want to ask. So if Sheila and he do really hit it off, it will be a simply splendid match."

"He seems to be a bit of a bounder to me," said Philip.

"Oh, angel, he can't be, he's so rich. And he's sure to turn out quite all right. Of course, they're both very young."

"Well, I suppose Sheila's quite capable of looking after herself. Where's Gregory, d'you know? I think I'll ask him if he'd care to come with me."

"I suppose you must go, angel?"

"Of course."

Gregory was in the tool-room, oiling his bat.

Philip went in quest of Gregory, who expressed himself delighted, if only Philip could wait a few minutes, for vitally important oiling operations were still in progress. Philip was quite prepared to wait. He had a thing or two to do before he started, and he had to get the car out.

"I say, may I drive a bit on the way?" Gregory asked.

"It's against the law," said his stepfather. "But I dare say we might manage it. Lucky you look more than your age. But, mind, I drive where there's traffic."

Half an hour later they were on the road. Philip drove at first, but soon gave place to Gregory at the wheel. The boy drove quite well already. Philip commented on his proficiency.

"Bob taught me," said Gregory. "He often lets me drive."

"By the way, Gregory, your mother wants me to tell you you're not to call Markham, Bob."

"Why not? Why the blazes shouldn't I? I do think that's the most absolute silly bunkum, don't you? I mean all that stuff about treating servants as if they were automatic machines. Don't you?"

"As a matter of fact, I do rather," said Philip. "But you'd better try not to call him Bob when your mother's listening."

"I don't see why," said Gregory. "I call it just snobbish. Bob's a jolly fine chap, you know."

"I do know," said Philip. "But if your mother feels like that about it . . . I always believe in humouring people, as long as it does no harm."

Gregory chuckled. "I say, was that what you used to do to me, before you rounded on me the other day and told me I was a nasty, surly brute of a brat?"

"Did I say that, Greg? Well, you aren't, are you?"

"Not now, but I was. We did behave like perfect pigs to you, Sheila and I. Didn't we? 'Specially me."

"You didn't seem as if you really loved me, Greg," said Philip. "But that's all over, now we understand each other."

"I should say it was. But, d'you know, there's something I've been wanting to ask you about. What ought I to call you? You see you aren't my father,

and one can't call any one stepfather, can one? And somehow, 'sir' seems silly."

"What's the matter with Philip, or Phil, if you prefer? That's my name."

"You wouldn't mind?"

"Lord no, Greg. If Markham's Bob, surely I'm Phil, or at least Philip."

"That's fine," said the boy. "I say, I do wish Sheila liked you, same as I do."

"I wish she did, Greg."

"But it's no use talking to Sheila just now. I say, that fellow Robinson's the absolutely outside limit, don't you think?"

"I must confess I haven't exactly taken to him. But perhaps he improves on further acquaintance."

"He's a stinker," said the boy. "I hate him. I can't think how Sheila sticks him. I believe he waves his hair."

"Well, as long as she likes him," Philip temporised.

"Mother's all over him too," Gregory went on. "I hope he won't stop long. D'you know?"

"Haven't an idea." Privately, Philip rather welcomed Roy Robinson's presence, because it made his stepdaughter much less unamiable than she was apt to be. He changed the subject and they talked of other things. They got lunch on the road and, with Philip at the wheel, ran into Southampton, where Philip had soon transacted his business. They wandered about a bit, looking at the big ships in the Water, until it was time for tea. Then they went to a hotel, and Philip ordered a spread, including ices, for Gregory's special benefit.

In the lounge, at some distance from them, a young man was sitting at a table alone, having tea. Philip did not notice him particularly, but Gregory's eyes kept going back to him, and then transferring themselves to Philip's face. "I say," he said at length, "see that

chap all by himself at a table over there?" Philip looked. "Yes," he said. "What about him? Friend of yours? If so, go and fetch him over."

"No," said Gregory. "I've never seen him before. But he's most extraordinarily like you, Phil. You look, and see if he isn't."

Philip, not greatly interested, looked. The young man, he thought, had a pleasant enough face, but, though he supposed he knew what Gregory meant, he couldn't see such a resemblance to himself as to call for comment. "Does he?" he said lazily. "'Fraid I can't see it."

"But he does," said Gregory. "His head's just the same funny shape as yours, and he's got the same way of holding it a little bit on one side. And his nose is like yours. Of course, he's a lot younger. But I expect you looked just like that when you were his age."

"They say one never knows what one really looks like oneself," Philip said. "Perhaps it's a mercy. Though I must say he's a decent-looking chap in his way."

"He looks jolly nice," said Gregory.

The young man motioned to a waiter, paid his bill, and got up to go. "Look," said Gregory, "he's just about your build too. I wonder who he is."

"Might be anybody. He looks a bit like an American from his clothes."

The young man departed, and they finished their tea without further incident. Philip drove the car past Botley and then let Gregory take on again. They went home by a circuitous route of byroads, in order to give the boy plenty of practice—and also because Philip had no intention of getting back till he could feel sure that his wife's visitor had gone.

Meanwhile, Ann Burton had been to tea at Lambern. Bob Markham had driven over for her after

lunch, and she had told him that she had originally been asked to go over and see the police at Newbury that afternoon, but had 'phoned to put off going there till the following morning, as they had told her their news would keep. They had refused to say over the telephone why they wanted to see her again. Bob had heard nothing about the discoveries made by the police, and could not tell her what the matter was likely to be. "I suppose it means they've discovered something at last," he said. "Let's hope it's good news. It probably isn't anything very important because, if they had actually found your father, of course they'd have told you over the 'phone."

"I do hope it isn't bad news," Ann said. "I really feel I ought to have gone there this afternoon. But I didn't like to put Mrs. Blakeway off after she had been so kind. Will Mr. Blakeway be there, do you know?"

"I shouldn't think so. He went over to Southampton this morning, and I doubt if he'll be back. But he might. Master Gregory's with him."

"I do hope Mrs. Blakeway hasn't got a houseful of visitors."

"No. They've mostly gone away. There's a Mr. Robinson, but I think he's out for the day with Miss Trefusis. There's nobody else."

"You like them, don't you,?" Ann asked.

"I think I do like Mr. Blakeway," said Bob, "though he's a bit of a dark horse, as I think I told you. Gregory's a good boy. He's got guts, if you know what I mean. Miss Sheila's rather a—well, I wouldn't go so far as to say I like her. Mrs. Blakeway's all right."

"She seemed to think very highly of your mother."

"No one could think too highly of mother," said Bob stoutly. "The only fault I have to find with Mrs. Blakeway is she's a bit patronising. Doesn't mean to be, but she is. It gets one's goat sometimes."

"I'm expecting Tom to-morrow," said Ann. "He

wired to say he was coming at once. He's sailing from Havre. But I don't expect he'll arrive in time to go to Newbury with me."

The car reached Lambourn and drew up before the Blakeways' house. Hilda, who was in the garden, came forward to welcome her visitor. "Oh, Mrs. Burton, it is so nice of you to come. I do so sympathise with you in your dreadful news, and I was afraid you might not feel equal to it."

Ann stepped back in consternation. The colour drained away from her face. "What is it?" she managed to say. "I haven't heard anything."

It was Hilda's turn to be surprised. "Oh, dear," she said. "I suppose I oughtn't to have said anything. But I thought you would be certain to know."

"What is it?" Ann repeated.

"About your father, my dear. I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid he's . . . met with an accident."

"You mean he's dead?" Ann asked, though she knew the answer already.

"I'm afraid he is," said Hilda gently. "Of course I should never have blurted it out like that unless I had thought you knew."

"How did you know? Bob Markham didn't know anything about it."

"My husband told me. He heard it from Colonel Welsh. The Chief Constable, you know."

"They asked me to go to Newbury this afternoon to see them, but I didn't like to put you off."

"My dear, I'm ever so sorry. Do come into the house, and I'll ring for tea."

Ann followed. "But I want to know exactly what has happened," she said.

"It is really very difficult," Hilda answered. "You see, my husband— Do get your things off first, Mrs. Burton, and I'll try to tell you when the man has brought in the tea."

It was not at all easy for Hilda, for she had not only to explain to Ann that her father had been a burglar, but also that he had been killed in a struggle with Hilda's own husband, while he was attempting burglary in his, and her, own house. It was really all very awkward, and Hilda did not at all know where to begin.

"I'm afraid what I have to tell you will come as a great shock, Mrs. Burton," Hilda opened. "I don't think you knew very much about your father recently, did you?"

"I know he drank far more than was good for him, if that's what you mean," said Ann defiantly. "But I was very fond of him all the same."

"I expect it was the drink made him go wrong. I've heard that it often does undermine people's morals."

"I'm sure father's morals weren't undermined," said Ann. "He was nobody's enemy but his own."

Hilda sighed. This was going to be very difficult indeed. "I'm afraid he did throw stones through the Vicar's window," she said. "Mr. Samson's wife told me all about it."

"That was because Mr. Samson called him an atheistical blackguard," said Ann. "It wasn't true. He was a Plymouth Brother. It hurt him horribly. Mrs. Markham told me about that."

"Perhaps, dear, but all the same he ought not to have thrown stones," said Hilda. "It wasn't at all a gentlemanly thing to do."

Ann was angry. She got up from her seat. "Mrs. Blakeway," she said, "will you kindly stop taking away father's character and tell me what has happened to him?"

Hilda did not like this. She felt it was rude. But she was ready to make excuses. "I'm sorry to say he got shot."

"Shot? Do you mean murdered?" Ann's tone was still fierce.

"No, Mrs. Burton. Of course not. Nothing of the sort. It was an accident."

"But who shot him? How did it happen?"

"He shot himself," said Hilda, and could not resist adding, "It was entirely his own fault. My husband was not in the least to blame."

"Mr. Blakeway? Whatever has he got to do with it?"

"Do sit down, Mrs. Burton, and I'll try to tell you, though you are really making it very hard. Won't you have some more tea?"

"No, thank you," said Ann. "I want to get this right. You said something about Mr. Blakeway."

"Well, you see they were fighting, and the revolver went off, and your father got shot."

"Do you mean Mr. Blakeway killed father?"

"No, I told you, nobody killed him. He shot himself by mistake with his own revolver. But he tried to kill my husband first. He was pointing the revolver at him when Philip threw a book he happened to be carrying, and then sprang upon him before he had time to fire. The revolver got wrenched round and when it went off he was killed."

Ann got up again. "I never heard such a pack of lies in all my life," she said. "As if father would try to kill any one. But it's even more absurd to suggest he would miss. Father was a simply marvellous shot. Not time to fire, indeed. I never heard such nonsense. But what was your husband doing, fighting with father? That's what I should like to know."

"Your father broke into our house. He was a burglar. That's how he got shot," said Hilda, firing her batteries hard and fast, for she wanted to get it over, and she had come to the conclusion that this Mrs. Burton was a most unreasonable woman and not at all the lady she had fancied her before.

Ann went off into shrieks of laughter, verging on positive hysteria. There had never been anything so

supremely ridiculous as the notion of her father taking to burglary in his old age. Could this preposterous female really believe such idiocy? Or, if not, what was her game? Ann, still laughing, began to regain her self-command, while Hilda Blakeway stood holding the sugar-tongs in front of her, rather as if they were the revolver of which she had been speaking—at all events, as a weapon of defence.

"Please stop laughing," she said. "I'm only trying to tell you what did happen. You don't suppose I enjoy telling you, do you?"

Ann regained her self-command. "But what you say is simply absurd," she said. "I suppose you must believe it's true, or you wouldn't tell me. But let me tell you this. I know father wasn't a burglar, and I know he wouldn't really ever have done anything really wrong. And, if he's dead, I mean to find out how he died."

"You can read the reports of the inquest if you like," said Hilda, much offended. "It was all in the papers. And if he wasn't a burglar, what do you suppose he was doing in my bedroom? He was coming out of my room when my husband found him."

"I don't know what he was doing," said Ann. "But he certainly wasn't stealing anything. I shall go straight off now to Colonel Welsh and ask him what really happened. And if you say it was all in the papers, why didn't any one tell me anything about it before? It can't have been, or these policemen would have known all about it."

"Can't you see?" said Hilda. "It *was* in the papers, but they have only just found out who the burglar was. You are at perfect liberty to go to Colonel Welsh, Mrs. Burton. He will only tell you that what I have just said is absolutely true."

"I don't care what he tells me," said Ann. "I believe you and your husband are making it all up, trying to

make father out a burglar. I believe some one murdered him."

"Mrs. Burton," said Hilda, "if you are accusing my husband of murdering your father I think the sooner you leave this house the better. Really, I have been trying to be kind, but—"

"You can keep your kindness to yourself, Mrs. Blakeway," said Ann, by this time in quite as much of a fury as Hilda. For there was relief for shattered nerves in getting into a rage.

"I will ring for Walker to show you out," said Hilda. "But in the circumstances you will hardly expect me to lend you the car."

"I wouldn't be seen dead in your car," said Ann; and then she suddenly realised she was making a fool of herself, and burst into tears.

"My dear," said Hilda, softened in a moment, "of course this must have been a terrible shock to you. Markham shall drive you straight home, and I will telephone to Colonel Welsh to say you will come and see him first thing in the morning."

"I know I'm making a fool of myself," sobbed Ann, "but I'd rather walk."

"Nonsense," said Hilda. "Oh, Walker"—for the footman had appeared in answer to the bell—"will you ask Markham to come here a moment?" She turned again to Ann. "Now I shall leave you," she said, "and when Markham comes, you tell him to take you straight home. You aren't fit to see Colonel Welsh this evening, and besides you wouldn't find him at his office. I'm really very sorry, but it wasn't my husband's fault at all, as you will soon find out, and you really must not say such things about him."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Blakeway," said Ann. "But I won't have things said about father either."

There was a knock at the door. Hilda went to it, and admitted Bob.

"Markham," she said. "Mrs. Burton is not feeling very well. I want you to take her home at once." She passed through the door and shut it behind her.

Bob, quite at a loss, looked at Ann. "Whatever's the matter?" he said.

"Take me home," said Ann. "I'll tell you on the way."

CHAPTER XV

A MODERN ELOPEMENT

ANN, in the car, recovered more of her composure. But it was a disjointed story that she poured into Bob Markham's ears. He, knowing all about the burglary at Sun House, was easily able to put two and two together. "Why," he said, "that must mean they think Captain Jay was the man Mr. Blakeway caught trying to burgle the house at Hampstead."

"As if father ever would . . ." Ann began.

Bob was not so sure in his own mind, for he had no high opinion of Captain Jay. But this was not the time for such suggestions. "Of course not," he said, "but I suppose they must have some reason for identifying the dead man as Captain Jay. They tried a lot to find out who he was, but they couldn't. I suppose they must have discovered something fresh. . . . I know, it'll be that photo you gave the police. I heard they had the burglar's photo in some newspaper, only I missed it. They'll have compared the photographs, and decided they're the same man."

"But they can't be," said Ann. "Not if the other man was a burglar. I don't believe it's father who's dead at all. They must have made a mistake."

"Let's hope so," said Bob. "You'll be able to find out in the morning what they really have got hold of. I know. I'm sure, if I ask Mrs. Blakeway, she'll let me come over for you in the morning and take you to the

police station. Or Mr. Blakeway will, if I ask him. I don't like the idea of your going alone. There's a car I can borrow from a man in the village."

Ann did not like the idea. After what she had said to Hilda, and Hilda to her, it seemed impossible to ask favours. But Bob would take no denial. Though she tried to prevent him, and positively forbade him to ask, he declared none the less that he would call for her as early as she liked the following morning, or 'phone up the post office to send a message round to his mother's house in the unlikely event of his failing to get leave. Nothing that Ann could say could shake his purpose.

They arrived at Bathease, and Ann, feeling much the better for her talk with Bob, had now to tell her story all over again to Mrs. Markham, much to the old woman's surprise and consternation. This time Bob helped her out in the telling; and, privately, Mrs. Markham was no more sure than her son that Captain Jay had been incapable of descending to burglary, though it was not the sort of crime she would have associated with him. She, however, like Bob, refrained from any suggestion that the charge against Captain Jay could possibly be true, and, by the time they had done talking, it was quite agreed among them that the dead man could not be Captain Jay at all, and that the police must have made an absurd mistake. Yet all the time each of them really felt sure that it would turn out to be Captain Jay, though Ann, at any rate, would not for a moment admit into her mind the idea that her father might have been a burglar. Whatever the explanation was, she was sure it could not possibly be that. Some wrong things he might have done, but emphatically burglary was not one of them.

Bob had only just driven off—for they had talked long—when there was another car at the door—this time the old Ford that was used for driving people to and from the station. Ann looked at the figure that

alighted from it. "Tom," she exclaimed, and ran down the garden path to welcome her son.

"I didn't expect you till to-morrow morning," she said, when the first round of embraces was over. "How nice it is to have you back, dear. You must come inside and have something to eat at once. You must be dreadfully tired."

"Nonsense, mother. I'm not a bit tired, or hungry. I got something to eat at Southampton. I came over from Havre, you know. What about grandfather? Has he been found?"

"The poor dear. She'll have you to help her now," said Mrs. Markham.

"Why, is anything really wrong? Just let me get my things off and pay the car. Won't be half a minute." Tom paid off the aged Ford and came up the path, carrying a couple of suit-cases. "The heavy stuff's coming on," he said. "I dumped it at the station. I wasn't sure if there'd be room. Now, what's this about grandfather?"

Ann plunged again into her story, which Tom received with every sign of astonishment. "Well, that beats the band," he said. "Of course, they've got him mixed up with some one else. As if grandfather would ever. You don't believe a word of it, do you, mother?"

"My dear, I don't know. I didn't believe it, but Bob says they wouldn't have identified him without good reason. Something about some special sort of measurements they make. I've forgotten what he called it. Of course, Tom, I know father wasn't a burglar."

"Of course he wasn't, mother, and, if you ask me, I should say the whole thing's a pack of nonsense from beginning to end. We'll buzz over to the police station in the morning and put these chaps through it. You watch me third degree them, mother. Till then, you just cheer up. Can't be moaning around when I've just come, can you?" He kissed her again. "That's

better. Sorry I missed Bob, Mrs. Markham. Lord, what years it seems since I saw him. Good old Bob."

"We're both proud of our lads, Mrs. Burton, and we've a right to be proud," said Mrs. Markham, smiling at Tom, and deciding in her own mind that he was a fine upstanding boy, but not a patch on her own. "Well, I mustn't stand talking here. I'll just run up to the shop and get something tasty for Mr. Tom's supper."

Mother and son were left alone, but what happened is neither pertinent to this story, nor different from what generally happens when mothers who are inordinately proud of their sons get them back after an absence. So we can cut that out.

Bob Markham decided to ask Mrs. Blakeway for leave to take Ann into Newbury. He did not know when Philip would get back, and he did not want to wait about, because he had a date in the village. Hilda seemed a bit surprised at the request, but evidently she did not like to refuse. She gave him the required leave of absence, provided that he got back before lunch time, as she would be wanting him to drive the car in the afternoon. So Bob went off and arranged to borrow an old Singer from a friend in the village.

Philip and Gregory got back only just in time to change for dinner. They seemed to be on the very best of terms, and Hilda got another surprise when she heard the boy addressing his stepfather as "Phil." She went to Philip's dressing-room while he was changing, and told him about Ann's visit. "It really wasn't my fault, angel," she said. "Of course, I can make allowances for the woman, but I do feel she behaved very badly. I really think people ought to have more self-control." Yet Hilda's own self-control during the visit had been not beyond exception.

Philip was sympathetic. "Nasty business for you, as well as for her," he said. "I almost wish I'd stayed to

help you out—only that'd have made matters worse. Of course, no one could possibly have guessed she wouldn't have known all about it. Very strange of the police not to have told her."

"She says they had asked her to go into Newbury this afternoon—only she put it off till to-morrow because of having promised to come here. That reminds me, Philip. I've told Markham he can take to-morrow morning off. He's borrowing a car from somewhere to drive her into Newbury. He wants to be there to stand by while she sees the police."

Philip's eyebrows went up.

"Of course, angel, I didn't much like it, but it seemed awkward to refuse when Markham asked. He was very keen about it; and especially after what happened at tea, I thought one ought to be generous."

"Why, yes," said Philip. "You did quite right. Young Markham seems to be very thick with this Mrs. Burton."

"He is," Hilda answered. "She isn't nearly so much of a lady as I thought when I first saw her. There was something—common about the way she behaved this afternoon."

Philip found it difficult in his own mind to associate Ann with commonness of any sort. But he was aware that the English had a way of thinking all people who come from the Dominions common. It was largely a matter of voice. "You'll want the Packard after lunch," he said. "Aren't you going over to Winchester?"

"Markham has promised faithfully to be back by lunch time."

"Then that's all right. No real reason why he shouldn't hold the lady's hand, if he wants to."

"Oh, I don't think she's that sort, angel. She looks old enough to be his mother."

It was strange to Philip to think of Ann looking old enough to be anybody's mother. Of course she must,

by now. But how could he picture her except as she had looked twenty years ago? What did she look like now? He wondered. Ann had been a good-looker in her young days, and no mistake. Well, he didn't want to know what she looked like after all these years. His business was to keep out of her way at all costs.

"I understand Mrs. Burton's son is expected in England to-morrow," Hilda was saying. "Mrs. Burton's son—Tom Burton."

"Oh," said Philip, with an indifference that he did not feel.

Sheila and her Roy did not come in to dinner. They were still out when first Gregory and then Hilda went off to bed, leaving Philip to sit up for them. Hilda, who valued the proprieties, was worried. "When they come in," she said, "you might send Sheila off to bed at once. I shall speak to her severely in the morning. But you will have to say something to Mr. Robinson to-night. Tell him you will not have it. It's not right, even if his intentions are—what they ought to be."

"We've got to remember young people aren't what they used to be in our young days," said Philip. "You know it is quite beyond my powers to pack Sheila off to bed if she doesn't want to go. And as for young Robinson, if I say anything to him he'll only cheek me back."

"But you must do something about it, Philip. I would sit up myself, only I shall be like a rag to-morrow if I do."

"I'll see what can be done, darling. But I make no promises. Anyway, I'll lock 'em out, so that they'll have to ask to be let in."

Philip sat on in the library, with a book and a decanter and siphon. Eleven o'clock came and went, and then midnight. Really, this was getting a bit thick. At one

o'clock he made up his mind to go to bed, whatever Hilda might say. He went upstairs and crept into his dressing-room without turning on the light. He could just see the communicating door with his wife's room was open.

Hilda's hearing was sharp. "Is that you, Philip?" Her bedside light was switched on. "Have they come in at last?"

Philip went into the bedroom. "There's no sign of them," he said. "I was just giving them up and coming to bed. If they do arrive, one of us is bound to hear the car."

"Oh, Philip," Hilda exclaimed, "I do hope they've had an accident. I mean a breakdown," she added. "Of course, I don't really hope they've had an accident, but you know what I mean. I've been lying awake, imagining the most dreadful things."

"You stop it, darling. I expect it's just a breakdown," said Philip soothingly. "They'll 'phone first thing in the morning to say the car petered out somewhere, and they had to stop the night. I dare say they're staying with friends."

"I'm sure they aren't. I feel certain something absolutely awful has happened."

"I don't," said Philip. "Better come in to you to-night, darling, hadn't I? That is, if you'd like me."

"Yes, come in," said Hilda. "Only I'm sure I shan't feel a bit nice. I always go all stiff when anything upsets me."

"I'll chance that," said Philip. "I shan't be three minutes."

A few minutes later he was back and in his wife's bed.

"Philip," Hilda whispered. "I do hope they aren't like this."

"Of course they aren't, love," said Philip. "I should hope they are a damn sight more comfortable than I am," was his unspoken comment.

At breakfast there was no sign of the truants' return, and no message. Gregory was inquisitive, and, when he was told that no one knew where they were, sarcastic. "I did think Sheila had a bit more sense," he said.

"Do you think we ought to tell the police, Philip?" Hilda asked. "They may be lying dead or hurt somewhere, after some awful smash." She said this, almost as if it would have been a relief.

"Police; lord, no," said Philip. "We'd have heard long ago if anything had happened to them. It isn't that. We can't do anything except wait."

"I suppose Markham's gone, has he?" Philip asked. Gregory answered. "Yes, nearly an hour ago. He said mother had given him leave."

"That's right, Greg," said Philip.

They heard the telephone bell ring in the lobby, and a measured step go to answer it. There was a long pause. "I wonder if that's them," said Hilda.

Apparently it was not, for after an interval the measured steps were heard again, going past the door, and then receding into the distance.

Hilda pushed back her chair. "I can't eat any breakfast," she said.

"Nonsense, mother," said Gregory. "Sheila knows how to look after herself."

Hilda took no notice. "I shall go mad, Philip, unless something happens soon."

Philip got up from his seat, came round the table and kissed her. "Cheer up, love," he said, "I expect it's all a false alarm."

"You promised to bowl to me this morning, Phil," said Gregory. He was apt to be a person of one idea.

"A bit later, Greg. I think your mother wants me now."

The telephone rang again, and there was another uneasy silence, scarcely broken by that measured tread in the hall. This time the steps came back sooner.

There was a knock, and the butler came in. "Miss Sheila is on the telephone, madam," he announced. "She says will you please come yourself."

Hilda ran to the telephone. "Sheila, is that you?" she said breathlessly. "Where have you been? You don't know what an awful night I've had. I didn't sleep a single wink."—"Liar," thought Philip, who, with Gregory, had followed her into the hall.

"You're where? Brighton? Whatever are you doing at Brighton, child?" There was a long interval. "You must come home at once. At once. . . . No, certainly not. . . . You have no right to speak to me like that. Hold on. Hold on, I say. I must speak to your father . . ."

She turned to Philip. "She says she won't come back unless she can bring him too. They have. At least I suppose they have. Of course, I told her she mustn't. Oh, whatever am I to say?"

"Give it me," said Philip. "That you, Sheila? You've given your mother a shock. Just you buzz back here as quick as you can, and we'll talk things over. . . . Yes, of course. We shall need him for the talking, shan't we? . . . That'll keep. You just buzz along. Right-o." Philip replaced the receiver.

"Well, that's that," he said. "I've told 'em both to hurry back, pronto. Then we shall see where we are. Don't take on, love. You wanted her to get off with him, didn't you?"

"Not that way," Hilda sobbed. "Only if she really loved him, Philip."

"Perhaps she does, darling. Modern love, you know. It's different from the old kind on the surface, but it's much the same underneath, I fancy."

Hilda awoke to the fact of Gregory's presence. "Go away, Gregory," she said. "Your father and I have a lot to talk about."

"Fat lot of good talking," was Philip's private

opinion. He caught Gregory's eye. The boy gave him a grin of sympathy, and Philip, very faintly, winked back. "All right, love," he said. "I'll come to your room. Looks as if that cricket'll have to wait a bit, Greg."

"Hell!" said Gregory. "I've got nothing to do with B—Markham out too."

"Why not try a spot of work for a change, my lad?"

"You will come as soon as you can?" Gregory pleaded.

"I'll try," said Philip. "But . . . no promises."

"Mother says I'm to come back without you at once," said Sheila, "and the Object says I'm to come back with you. Mother's in an awful stew. Which is it to be?"

Roy Robinson shrugged his shoulders. "Your stunt, poodle," he said. "All depends on your intentions, I suppose. If we're thinking of going on together, we'd better keep in with the old people, unless there's anything specially against it. If not, then there's no point in my showing up. Of course, in that case I'll drive you home and put you down at the gates. What is it—Hearts or No Bid?"

"It's most certainly 'No Bid' if you put it like that, you unmentionable pig," said Sheila.

"Oh, if you wish to be proposed to in due form, poodle . . . Mademoiselle, may I solicit the honour of your heart and hand for a connection of an experimental nature, which may conceivably be placed on a more permanent footing at a later stage by mutual consent, and subject to contract, and all that? That better?"

"I notice you aren't asking me to marry you," said Sheila. "The answer is, quite decidedly, No Bid."

"I don't mind marrying you if you really want to. But divorces are such a beastly nuisance, and so unnecessary."

"Thank you," said Sheila. "You have said quite enough. You drive me as far as the entrance gates, and I'll walk up."

"As you please," said Roy. "I'll go and get the car."

"My dear Hilda," said Philip, "you must really make up your mind what you do want. Either you are so shocked that you wish Sheila never to see him again. That is Number One. Or you are so shocked that you want them to marry at once, whether they suit each other or not. That is Number Two. Or you think, after this, they had better see some more of each other, after they have had a good talking to, and try to find out whether they do want to get married or not. That is Number Three. Which is it you want?"

"Please, Philip, don't be logical," said Hilda. "It makes my head go round."

"Very well, love. Only it's really best for somebody to be logical on these occasions. I gather you refuse to vote. I vote for Number Three. Think it over." He kissed Hilda again, with particular tenderness. "And now, ownest, I'm going to bowl to Gregory."

"I say, Phil, that was a corker," said Gregory, as Philip bowled him first ball. For Philip was getting back quite a lot of his old skill, and there was a particular kind of ball he had found that had Gregory absolutely every time. Yet the boy was shaping well as a bat.

Philip took the bat. "This is how you want to play that ball," he said. "Now let's see if I can do it again."

Gregory got the next one away with a good straight bat. "That's better," said Philip.

"I say, you are nice," said Gregory.

CHAPTER XVI
ENTER SCOTLAND YARD

BOB MARKHAM found a stranger in his mother's front garden. "Hallo, Bob," said the stranger. "Forgotten me, have you?"

Bob grasped the other's hand. "Tom," he said. "When did you turn up?"

"Last night." Tom gave details of his arrival. "I heard you were coming over this morning; so I came out here specially to waylay you. Rotten business this about grandfather. Mother's frightfully upset. Got any idea what the truth of it really is?"

"I'm not sure I have," said Bob. "Of course, it may be a case of mistaken identity, but I rather doubt if it is. We'll find that out for sure this morning, I expect."

"It's hellish difficult to believe grandfather was a burglar. What was he like these latter days? You know more about him than I do."

Bob hesitated. "He wasn't so bad—when he was off the drink. Except when he was taken bad with religion. When he had a religious fit on him he usually got drunker than usual afterwards."

"I suppose he must have got ever so much worse after he left Canada?"

Bob nodded. "Mother did her best," he said, "but he used to get out of hand. Sometimes he'd go off for a long spell and come back all in. Did they tell you how he broke the Vicar's windows?"

Tom Burton nodded. "Let's go a bit of a stroll," he said. "Mother won't be ready just yet. I want to get this as straight as I can before we go to Newbury. What's this Mr. Blakeway of yours like. Decent fellow?"

"He's a jolly good employer. Goes out of his way

to be kind and put himself in one's place. But he's a queer fish too. Something a bit secret about him, as if he never meant you to know quite what he was thinking."

"No chance of his having done grandfather in and got away with a frame-up?"

Bob shook his head. "Mr. Blakeway's all right," he said. "Besides, why should he? He'd nothing against Captain Jay. He never saw him before in his life."

"What did grandfather go to call on him for then? We've only his word for it he didn't know him."

"How they explained that," said Bob, "was that he went to spy out the house so as to be able to burgle it later on. But Mr. Blakeway suggested that perhaps the old gentleman had really mistaken him for some one else, and really did think he knew him."

"It all sounds damned fishy to me, if it really was grandfather at all. You heard I'd got a scholarship up to Oxford, Bob?"

"Jolly glad you have, Tom. I'm sure you'll knock 'em all to fits up there."

"What about you, Bob? You don't mean to stay driving somebody else's automobile all your life, do you? What are you doing? Swotting up at nights, or what?"

"I reckon I'll stay shoving. I'm no good at books."

"You oughtn't to, Bob. I've been a shover in vacation, and a lumberman, and the lord knows what. But that's different."

"You're a gentleman, Tom," said Bob, "and I'm not. That's the difference."

"I don't take much stock in gentlemen."

"You'll soon find they do over here. Mother does. You will when you've been to Oxford."

"Don't you believe it. I hate a snob."

"All the same, gentlemen are gentlemen over here," said Bob. "You'll know what I mean, when you've been here a bit."

"Time we were getting back," said Tom. "Mother ought to be ready by now."

Now that Tom Burton had come, Bob felt that Ann no longer needed his services, except as driver of the car. So, when they drew up outside the police station, he said he would stop with the car, while they did their business.

But Ann would not hear of this. "You've been such a help to me, Bob," she said, "and I want you now, as well as Tom. He'll say the same. You must come in with us."

"Of course you must, Bob," Tom added his entreaties. So they all three went into the station together.

Inspector Longsight was ready for them, Colonel Welsh not having come to his office as yet. Indeed, on second thoughts the Chief Constable had much preferred leaving to some one else the task of explaining to the "nice little woman" that her father had been a burglar, and had been killed in a scuffle, after threatening an innocent householder with a loaded revolver. So Inspector Longsight received them in his little office.

"I'm afraid I have some very unpleasant news for you, madam," he began, when the introductions were over.

"If you mean that you think my grandfather was killed in trying to burgle Mrs. Blakeway's house," Tom answered, "my mother knows that. Only at present we do not believe it. We want to know what proofs you have."

This inspector was taken aback. "How do you come to know about it?" he asked suspiciously.

"Mother went to Mrs. Blakeway's yesterday," said Tom. "Mrs. Blakeway had heard from Colonel Welsh, and she mentioned it to my mother, under the impression that she had heard it already. In our opinion, inspector, it is a ridiculous story. The first thing my mother

wishes to ask you is why you suppose that the man who was killed in Mr. Blakeway's house was my grandfather."

"There isn't much doubt, sir. Scotland Yard had the dead man's photograph, and it coincides in every important respect with the photo with which Mrs. Burton supplied us. There's a scar, sir, across the cheek, and there's other reasons. I think the Scotland Yard people are pretty certain about it being him, sir. Of course, you could apply for an exhumation order. But that won't alter facts."

The inspector's story certainly was impressive. "If you're right," Tom resumed, "and I'm not admitting you are, we still absolutely deny that my grandfather can have been a burglar."

Inspector Longsight inclined his head. "Very natural that you and the lady should feel like that, sir," he said. "Very natural and proper. Perhaps you would care to glance over the report of the inquest. I have it here." He passed Tom a sheaf of papers. "You and the lady just look through that, sir, before we say any more."

There was silence, while the three visitors read through the report.

"This doesn't prove anything, you know," said Tom. "It only shows no one took the trouble to question what Mr. Blakeway said."

"Mr. Fowler saw it too, Tom," Bob suggested. "Mr. Fowler's a decent chap, too, if ever there was one."

"There's no evidence of burglary," Tom persisted. "It says here nothing had been taken."

"That would be because he was interrupted, sir," said the inspector. "There's evidence he turned the lady's bedroom upside down."

"I know it says that," said Tom. "But I want to know a whole lot more about it before I believe anything, and so does mother. We've come here to demand a full investigation."

"I don't see what you gain by that, sir," Inspector

Longsight suggested. "You and the lady had better think things over carefully before you do anything, and I should advise you to consult a good lawyer. There's Mr. Grant, opposite the Town Hall. He's a good man. If you want an exhumation order, he'll be able to tell you how to set about it."

"Look here, inspector," said Tom. "How can they be sure, merely from looking at a couple of photographs, that they're the same man? Especially as the one mother had was years old."

Inspector Longsight explained that such things were not his business. They were dealt with by specialists up in London. But the specialists were able, from photographs, to take measurements of the shape of the head, the position of the bones and features, and that sort of thing, so as to establish a strong presumption of identity, even when the superficial appearance of the portraits that were being compared was very different. Besides, the scar seemed to clinch the matter.

"But it's only a presumption, surely," Tom insisted. "You can't be sure. They say everybody has a double somewhere."

"I wouldn't like to say, as to that," Longsight answered. "But what people call doubles wouldn't measure up the same, by the system they've got at the Yard. However, if you and the lady aren't satisfied, you'd better consult a lawyer, as I suggested. Of course, I shall report to the Chief Constable what you say."

"You're sure Colonel Welsh won't be in, if we wait?" Ann asked. She felt the colonel would be much more likely to help her out than this stiff inspector.

"I'm not saying he won't, ma'am. I'm not sure. If you care to wait here, I will make inquiries."

Longsight went into another room and put through a call to Colonel Welsh's house. The Chief Constable himself answered the 'phone. The inspector told him that Mrs. Burton had brought her son with her, and

that they absolutely refused to believe that Captain Jay had been a burglar, or even that he could be the man who had been killed in Blakeway's house. They were demanding proof; there had been talk about an exhumation order.

Colonel Welsh was inclined to press his subordinate to get rid of the visitors somehow. He at any rate had no doubt that the dead man was Jay, and the question of an exhumation would be wholly outside his jurisdiction. It was a matter for the Home Office and, as the death had occurred in London, the Metropolitan police. "I told the lady she had better see a lawyer, sir," Longsight reported.

"Quite right, inspector; it's an infernally troublesome business. I won't come round now. I've got . . . a lot of work to do. So you must get rid of 'em somehow. But I'll tell you what I will do. I'll ring up Superintendent Wilson at the Yard and see if he's back; and if he is, I will see what he thinks about it. Don't tell 'em that, of course. But say you'll report to me, and I shall see what can be done."

Longsight went back to his office and answered that the Chief Constable was not available, but that he would make a full report to him, and let Mrs. Burton know what it had been settled to do. Meanwhile, if she chose to see a lawyer—but she might prefer to await the Chief Constable's opinion.

With that the visitors had to be content. They decided not to call on a lawyer for the time being, as Tom was not at all sure he wanted to go to the fellow that inspector recommended, and none of them knew any one else.

"I could ask Mr. Blakeway," Bob suggested.

"No, don't do that," said Tom, so sharply as to take Bob aback.

"Why, surely," he said, "you aren't thinking Mr. Blakeway had anything to do with—"



"I'm not thinking anything," Tom answered. "But your Mr. Blakeway as good as shot grandfather, by his own story—of course, if it was grandfather at all. So he's the very last man I want to consult."

"Bit awkward for me," said Bob, "being his shover, if that's how you feel."

"Man, I don't feel anything. It's simply that I don't know."

"I think, Tom," Ann put in, "we had better wait till we hear from Colonel Welsh. He was very kind to me before, much nicer than Inspector Longsight."

"I tell you what," said Tom. "I think we ought to have another shot at seeing Captain Pollen. I know the police say he knows nothing about it. But it all looks to me fishy, and if I saw him he might cough something up. He knows me. I met him once, with grandfather, over in Canada."

"What's he like?" asked Bob.

"Little sort of a chap. I didn't like him much. But I don't know anything about him really. He may be all right."

"But no one seems to know where he is," Ann objected.

"We could try London—that place you went to, Bob—and, failing that, Bristol. He can't be always out at sea. But we'll give it a day, to see if that Chief Constable has anything to say."

Colonel Welsh, meanwhile, had been on the telephone to Scotland Yard. Wilson was not back yet, but Inspector Blaikie, to whom the call was put through, knew about the case. "Not much doubt about the identification, I should say, sir," he opined. "I was going to tell Mr. Wilson about it as soon as he got back. Does this latest business mean you want that man Pollen seen again after all? Your people told us not to trouble, now that it was all cleared up."

Welsh reflected. "Yes," he said, "might be as well to see Pollen, if he's to be found. Not that I think you'll get anything out of it. And what about an exhumation, if this Mrs. Burton wants it?"

"No difficulty about that, sir," said Blaikie. "If the lady's father has been buried without a name, because he couldn't be identified, she's entitled to claim him. Of course, she'd have to take the line that it was him, or she couldn't get the order."

"But she says it can't be her father," Welsh objected.

"Can't help that, sir. She'd better take the line it is him if she wants the body exhumed. Then, if he isn't, she can easily hand him back. If she tries for an ordinary exhumation order, there is bound to be no end of a bother. You advise her accordingly, sir. That's the best way. Because, of course, there's no real doubt about it being him all right."

"I'll see what can be done," Welsh sighed. "But my inspector seems to think she is a decidedly obstinate lady."

"They are, sir," said Blaikie sagely. "Never knew one that wasn't. But you can take my word for it that's the best way. I'll let the Superintendent know you rang up, sir, as soon as he gets back."

Bob, meanwhile, had deposited Ann and Tom at Bathease and returned to duty. Philip strolled into the garage soon after he got back. "Mrs. Blakeway wants the car at two-thirty, Markham."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, how did you get on this morning, Markham?"

"Mrs. Burton's son has turned up, sir. Young Tom Burton. I used to know him in Canada. So he went over to Newbury with us this morning. He got in at Southampton yesterday, sir, before he was expected."

"Oh, so he went with his mother? I suppose she didn't need your help then—except to drive."

"They asked me to go and see the police with them, sir. So I did." Bob smiled. "It wasn't a very pleasant interview. Colonel Welsh wasn't there, sir, only that Inspector Longsight that always looks down his nose at you."

"Welsh slid out, did he? Just like him. Well, what happened?"

"Mrs. Burton is quite firm her father never burgled anybody. She says she doesn't really believe it was he that got shot at all."

"Oh! Then what's she doing about it?"

"There was some talk about an exhumation order, sir. But, even if the body does prove to be Captain Jay, Mr. Tom says he's going to insist on a thorough inquiry into the whole thing. He's waiting to hear from the Chief Constable, but then I expect he'll go to a lawyer."

"He'd much better let sleeping dogs lie," Philip suggested. "Don't you think so, Markham? No point in digging any deeper into that old fellow's affairs. I should tell them that, if I were you."

"It's quite natural, sir, not liking to have it made out your father was a burglar."

"But if he was one, Markham, the less you say about it the better. Well, the car at two-thirty. That all clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"That you, Welsh?" It was Wilson's voice over the telephone. "I've just got back, and Blaikie told me you'd rung up. About that Jay case. I should say there is no doubt at all about it being the same man. What Blaikie told you about exhumation orders was quite true, but of course that's Mrs. Burton's affair. She'll have to apply, in London, or her son will, if they want anything done. . . . Yes, Home Office. Her lawyer'll see to it all. . . . But that wasn't what I rung up about. I've been thinking things over a bit, and

there are one or two interesting points about the case as a whole. . . . No, nothing I can tell you about over the 'phone. They aren't definite enough yet. Merely notions floating about in my mind . . . Yes, I mean to look into them, but I haven't had a chance yet. And, of course, Welsh, it'd simplify matters if you put your end of the case in the Yard's hands. We can come in at the Hampstead end, of course, in any event. . . . You're willing? Good. Then I take it I've a free hand. . . . Lord, man, I don't know what I think yet. . . . Yes, that. I do certainly think it wants some more looking into. I'll 'phone up again as soon as I've had a chance to do that. Good-night."

Colonel Welsh replaced the receiver. He was puzzled, and a little perturbed. "What the devil did Wilson mean?" he muttered. "He'd never have spoken like that unless he'd meant something pretty serious. Blest if I know. But I'd better tell that little woman we're looking into things thoroughly. Blest if I don't drive over now and tell her myself."

"Wherever are you going?" Mrs. Welsh asked, as the colonel passed her in the drive.

"Important business," said her husband. "Shan't be long."

So Ann received a call from the Chief Constable that afternoon. Tom was out for a long walk, and Mrs. Markham was upstairs resting.

"'Fraid you weren't quite satisfied, Mrs. Burton, with what my inspector told you this morning?"

"I wasn't at all satisfied," said Ann. "It is simply absurd to suggest that my father was a burglar."

"What I came over to tell you, Mrs. Burton, was that we are going to make an absolutely thorough inquiry into the whole thing from beginning to end. I have just been on the telephone to Scotland Yard and instructed them, and you can rest assured that no

stone will be left unturned to sift the entire matter until it is absolutely clear."

Ann did not mind the colonel mixing his metaphors. She was far too grateful to notice. "I was sure you would see how absurd it was," she said, with her best smile. Ann was quite confirmed in her view that Inspector Longsight was a duffer, and Colonel Welsh quite the most efficient Chief Constable there had ever been. Which was not quite true.

Welsh went on to convey to her Blaikie's advice about exhumation. Ann did not like it a bit. She utterly refused to admit that the dead man would be her father. Now that Scotland Yard was at work on the whole case, she would leave the question of exhumation over till she heard what they were able to find out.

Ann and the colonel parted on the best of terms; and Tom, when he came back from his walk, found his mother immensely cheered up by the Chief Constable's visit.

CHAPTER XVII

JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS MEETING

HILDA BLAKEWAY had gone out by the time Sheila and Roy got back to Lambourn. For Roy Robinson did come back with her right to the house, in spite of what had been said in Brighton. They had talked matters out in the car, and the result was that Roy, not quite sure whether he liked it or not, had now to regard himself as officially engaged to be married. For Sheila was not a girl who was likely to let a man go easily if she wanted him, and she made up her mind that she did want Roy. How much she wanted him, and how much she wanted his money, perhaps she knew. Perhaps she did not; there is in any case no need for us to inquire. The point is that Sheila came back with her

prize in tow, even if the risk was not over that he might yet contrive to make his escape.

There had been some discussion on the way about what should be said to Hilda and Philip. Ordinarily Sheila would have maintained that her matrimonial affairs were no one's business but her own, but she had not been above using her mother's feelings as an argument in talking Roy over—so that she could scarcely take that line. But she was firm that she would not have Roy asking Philip's consent, or anything like that. She recognised her mother's authority, but assuredly not her stepfather's.

But when they arrived, in mid-afternoon, Mrs. Blakeway had gone out, and there was nobody about except Philip—for Gregory too was nowhere to be seen. Philip greeted them smiling. "Hallo, you two," he said. "Back at last. Your mother says I'm to talk to you both most severely. Seriously, you have given her a terrible shock, Sheila. The question is, what happens next?"

"Why should anything happen?" Sheila asked truculently. "It's no business of yours, in any case."

"Don't be an ass, child," said Philip. "You might give me credit for wanting to do what I can for peace and quietness. It'll be very much my business if your mother stays awake all night, as she did last night when you didn't come in."

"Well, I don't see there's any need to fuss," said Sheila. "We're going to get married. That ought to satisfy her."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Philip. "Of course, if you're both sure you'll suit each other, there's no more to be said. Your mother will be placated, and you will live happily together ever afterwards. You are both sure, are you?"

"We're trying it, anyhow," said Sheila. "Who's ever sure of anything?"

"What about you, Mr. Robinson?" Philip asked.

"Sheila seems to want to get married," said that young man. "So I said right-o."

"Then that's settled," said Philip, "for the present at any rate. I offer you both my congratulations, if you'll have them. There's Gregory coming across the lawn. You'd better tell him, and see what he says." Philip strolled away.

"Well, he's a cool one," said Roy.

"I hate him," said Sheila. "He's always as if he was mocking at you when he's pretending to be most polite. Mother's quite different. I can't think why she married him."

"I can," said Roy. "I know now why men do marry women. It's always been a bit of a mystery till to-day."

Gregory came up. "So you've come back at last," he said to Sheila. "Mother hasn't half been in a stew. Well, what about it? Going to get married, or live in sin, or is it all off? I should call it off if I were you. He doesn't look to me as if he'd make a good husband."

"You keep a civil tongue in your head, young man," said Roy, "or as your prospective brother-in-law, I'll put you over my knee and spank you."

Gregory looked Roy up and down with contempt. "Oh, it's that, is it?" he said. "I'm ashamed of you, Sheila. I did think you had more sense." He walked away with his head in the air.

"Beast," said Sheila. "Nobody seems to love us, really, Roy. Come and play tennis."

"Much too hot."

"I said come and play tennis."

"And I said much too hot. No, my girl, you can't have it both ways. If you insist on marrying me, I won't be bullied as well. I shall go for a bathe, and then sleep in the sun while you keep the flies off me."

"All right, we'll bathe," said Sheila. "There are towels and things down there. Come on, Roy."

They disappeared in the direction of the bathing-pool.

Hilda came back in the car. "Are they here yet?" she asked Philip anxiously.

"Yes, Sheila says they're getting married. The chap doesn't deny it. So perhaps they are."

Hilda heaved a sigh of relief. "Then that's all right," she said. "At least, I mean, of course it's not all right, but it isn't nearly so bad as it might have been. Mrs. Murdoch was telling me this afternoon how frightfully rich he'll be. And his father's health isn't at all good, I understand."

"Ghoul," said Philip. "He's a young puppy, if you ask me. But Sheila'll manage him, once she's got him hooked."

"Angel, how dreadfully you talk," said Hilda. "As if Sheila would. I expect he's terribly in love with her. He must have led the poor girl on."

"Have it your own way, love," said Philip. "He's said he'll marry her, and that's the main point. Enjoy yourself this afternoon?"

"No," said Hilda. "I was much too worried about Sheila. What's this about that awful woman, Mrs. Burton, having the inquest reopened or something? I was asking Markham about what happened, and he said something of the sort. Will you have to go up to town again to give evidence if they do?"

"I don't think they can reopen the inquest," said Philip. "I think it's only a question of Mrs. Burton identifying the body, and burying it under the proper name."

"They won't want you for that, will they? It's nothing to do with you."

"I shouldn't think so," Philip answered. "I hope not."

Sam Fowler 'phoned up that evening to speak to Philip. "Rather want to see you, old chap," he said. "Be all right if I run down to-morrow?"

"Perfectly," said Philip. "We're all alone, except for a cub of Sheila's. What is it? Business?"

"Not exactly. There's a chap been on the 'phone from Scotland Yard. He wants to come round and see me. I said I'd be out of town to-morrow, because he sounded a bit mysterious, and I thought I'd better see you first. Anything happened your end?"

"Nothing very definite, except that Tom's turned up at Bathease. Yes, Ann's Tom. And they're trying to get the police to take the whole thing up again, because they refuse to believe the captain ever went burgling in his life. But, look here, I don't want to talk over the 'phone. You run down as early as you can."

Accordingly, Sam Fowler arrived at Lambourn about noon on the following morning. Roy Robinson, despite Sheila's protests, had gone back to town, on a plea of engagements, and she had not succeeded in making him promise to tell his father of his entanglement. Consequently, she had gone off by herself to sulk. Hilda had taken Gregory to Newbury on a shopping expedition, and the coast was clear. Philip and his friend went into the copse, and then sat down to talk.

"Who was the fellow who rang you up? What did he say?"

"His name was Blaikie. He was an inspector or something. He said he had to put through a few routine inquiries about that affair at Sun House, because the police thought they had discovered who the dead man was. I shouldn't have thought much of it, if he had not insisted so it was simply a routine inquiry, but I rather gather that's what they always say when they want to ask you an awkward question without putting you on your guard."

Philip tapped his teeth with his cigarette holder. "I must say it looks as if we weren't quite out of the wood yet," he said. "Damn Ann for turning up just

now. We'd have been right as rain if it hadn't been for that. It really is the rottenest luck."

"She hasn't seen you, has she?"

"No. Of course, if she once did, it would be all absolutely U-P. What d'you think we'd better do—or, at any rate, me? Cut and run—I mean go abroad till it blows over, or what?"

Sam reflected. "It depends," he said. "If the Yard people are suspicious, it'd only make them more so, and perhaps they wouldn't let you go."

"I still can't make out about that Yard man who talked to me. Wilson, you know. Was it just an accident, his turning up like that, or was he after me all the time? Till you 'phoned, I was rather banking on it being an accident, but now I'm not so sure."

"I think, on the whole, if I were you I should sit tight for the present," Sam said. "But I should be ready to cut and run if occasion arises. Same here, because I'm in it, quite as much as you. How does one cut and run? It's so long ago, I've got out of practice."

"The first thing for you, Sam, is to get all the cash you can lay hands on and keep it ready at the office. And of course you'd better turn over our holdings into bearer bonds where you see a chance. I'll do the same. But I don't want to cut if I can help it. Much too comfortable as I am. And, d'you know, Sam, I'm getting really fond of that boy."

"You mind your eye, Phil. You and I can't afford to be sentimental. Of course, it's worse for you than for me. I travel light. You don't feel any hankering to see Ann, do you?"

"Not a bit. I half thought I did, but I don't. It's a bit different about Tom, though. I wonder what he's like."

"Like you, I shouldn't wonder."

The conversation plunged into business technicalities, concerning the transference of assets into a portable

and untraceable form. "Seems like old times, Phil, don't it?" said Sam. "But there isn't any Captain Jay this time."

"There's got to be," said Philip, "supposing it comes to the point. You don't know any one who'd do it, do you? South America, for choice. Any of the shippers we deal with?"

"There's Harker," said Sam doubtfully. "He might. But he'd bleed us white, and I wouldn't trust him an inch. I can't think of any one else. Unless I tried Ankerström. I'd forgotten him."

"It may come to that. Think hard, though, in case there's any one better. But don't do anything yet. I'm still hoping it'll be all right. Get ready, though. If we do hop, we'll have to hop quick."

Sam went back to London after lunch, at which Sheila did not appear. After lunch, Philip moved about, vaguely uneasy. He had been seriously worried by his talk with Sam, though he told himself again and again to cheer up and trust his luck. For the next day or two he was noticeably fidgety and unlike his usual self—so much so that Hilda felt quite sure he was ill, and wanted to put him to bed and send for a doctor. But Philip would have none of that, though he admitted to feeling a bit off colour. He moaned about, bowled to Gregory with much less than his usual skill, and did his best to keep patient while he waited for news of Sam's interview with the inspector from Scotland Yard. No news had come when, two days later, Philip, having composed himself for a quiet afternoon, drew out his pipe and felt for his tobacco pouch, only to discover that he had run right out of tobacco. He decided to take the car into Newbury and get some. It would give him something to do.

Philip ran into Newbury and parked his car. He got his tobacco and went into the Jack for tea. In the lounge was the same young man he had seen at South-

ampton, when Gregory had commented on how alike they were. Philip still couldn't see it. The young man made a casual remark about the weather, and they entered into desultory talk. He appeared to be a stranger to the neighbourhood. "You see," he said, "I come from Canada really, only I've just got a scholarship to Oxford."

Philip stiffened suddenly. He felt blood rushing to his head. He was conscious of a sudden enlightenment. "I've never been to Canada," he managed to say, "though I've knocked about in most places in my time." And all the while his mind was saying over and over again, with a stunned and senseless iteration, "So this is Tom, this is Tom, this is Tom." Or, with a slight variation, "This lad's my son."

"Staying here?" Philip asked, when he was under control enough to speak again.

"No, sir. I've just been telling you. I'm at a place called Bathease. Pretty place too. I like your English villages. Nothing like them in Canada. My mother's there. At least, I mean she's staying there. We came in on the bus. I'm expecting her any minute to tea."

Philip got up hastily, looked at his watch, said, "Good heavens, I'd no idea it was so late," threw down some loose silver, gave the young man a hasty "Good-day," and fairly ran out into the street. He almost collided with a lady who was coming in, gave one affrighted glance at her, and fled. Possibly she had not recognised him. It was twenty years since they had met, and his hat had been well down over his eyes. But there was no mistaking her. He had seen Ann Burton again, and it was all odds she had seen him too.

"Whatever's the matter, mother?" said Tom as Ann came in, white as a ghost, and clutching at the nearest chair for support.

"It's nothing. I've just come over faint. It must

be the heat." Ann's shock had been far greater than Philip's, for he had been in a manner prepared. "Let me sit down. I shall be all right soon."

"I'll order tea. You look frightfully bad." He supported her to a chair.

"Brandy," said Ann faintly.

"I'll get some." It was out of hours, but Tom's urgent demands extracted a brandy from a suspicious and reluctant manageress. Ann drank it, and choked, but her colour began to come back. Tom hovered round, full of solicitude. It was not like his mother to be taken that way.

"I think it must have been the heat," said Ann. "I can't think of anything else to account for my going faint like that."

"Ought you to have a doctor?"

"No, of course not. I shall be all right by and by."

"I was talking to a fellow before you came in, mother," said Tom, "and then he rushed off all of a sudden. I suppose he remembered something he'd forgotten. Rather a nice man, I thought him. He lived somewhere round here."

"What was he like?" asked Ann.

"Oh, oldish, well-made fellow, with rather nice brown eyes. Something attracted me about the look of him. So I made some inane remark, and we started talking."

"Did he tell you his name, Tom?"

Tom laughed. "Oh, no," he said, "we didn't get so far as that. We only talked for a few minutes. And then he went, like a streak of lightning. Funny, though, my feeling attracted like that to an absolute stranger."

"Yes, very funny," said Ann. "I feel better now, Tom. You pay, or we shall be missing the bus."

CHAPTER XVIII

SUPERINTENDENT WILSON'S EIGHT QUESTIONS

SUPERINTENDENT HENRY WILSON, who was always thorough, had read very carefully through the report of the proceedings at the inquest on the unknown man who had met his death at Sun House. Abbreviated as the report was, it struck him that there were one or two curious points about the case.

In the first place, though the burglar had had time to ransack Mrs. Blakeway's room, so as to leave everything in confusion, it did not appear that he had collected any swag at all as a result of his search. Of course, he might have found nothing worth taking, or that point might have been missed out in the report. But it seemed worth further inquiry.

Secondly, nothing was said as to the burglar having had with him either a bag, in which he could pack his spoil, or any burgling tools of any kind, although he was stated to have broken into the house by forcing a window. That too might be merely an omission in the report, but, if so, it was a curious omission. Usually, in these cases, any "exhibits," such as burglars' kit, were put on show with a good deal of ostentation. Nor did the list of objects found on the burglar include gloves, though he appeared to have left no finger-prints on the window where he was said to have broken into the house.

Thirdly, the man had undoubtedly been addressing a revivalist meeting on Hampstead Heath in the course of the afternoon. That, of course, did not rule out his being a burglar, but it was something out of the ordinary, and Wilson was looking for all points that seemed in any way peculiar about the case.

Fourthly, there had been no servants at all in the house, though there had been visitors. That had been

explained at the inquest, but all the same, it went down among Wilson's list of the odd factors which the affair presented.

Fifthly, the dead man had called on Blakeway in the course of the afternoon, and had gone away, returning subsequently by the window. It was admitted that he had asked for money, and had claimed old acquaintance with Blakeway. Blakeway had denied ever having seen him before, but there was only Blakeway's word for that. Of course, there was no ground for doubting his word, unless other reasons existed. But the point was worth noting. However, if he had known the dead man before, would he ever have admitted that he had claimed acquaintance? Hardly, unless there was some special reason that forced him to admit it. Was there such a reason? Wilson did not know. So there was another point for further inquiry.

Sixthly, one of the witnesses, Major Sayers, had seemed as if he wanted to say more than he was allowed to say. At least, that was Wilson's impression, though the summary of the major's evidence was too short for him to be at all certain. Still, it might be worth while to see Sayers.

Seventhly, it appeared that of the witnesses only one, Samuel Fowler, had actually witnessed the struggle between Blakeway and the dead man. The others had come on the scene only when it was over. That indicated Fowler, rather than Sayers, as the most important person to get into touch with.

Eighthly, the doctor had been apparently quite satisfied that the wound could have been inflicted in the way described. So that wasn't really an eighthly at all. Wash it out, unless it seemed desirable at a later stage to confirm the doctor's testimony.

Eightly, then, the dead man had smelt so strongly of rum that one person after another had commented upon it. But would a man drink heavily in preparation

for a burglary, especially if his method involved hiding for some prolonged period in the house? Moreover, had he drunk the rum before or after his earlier visit to Blakeway? The point might not be important, but it intrigued Wilson. Where and when had the dead man got the rum?

Well, these points would do to be going on with, though there might be others later on. Wilson was hard pressed with another case, and could not at once follow up himself. He sent for Inspector Blaikie and laid his provisional questions before him. He wanted Blaikie to do three things—see the Hampstead inspector who had handled the case, and talk to him with these eight questions in mind; see Fowler, and see Major Sayers. And, of course, take any other steps that occurred to him as desirable. Then he could report progress, and by then Wilson might be more free to follow the matter up himself.

Blaikie seemed not to take much stock of his superior's points, but Wilson knew he could rely on him to follow them up patiently, if without any special flair. Patient investigation was Inspector Blaikie's long suit.

The industrious inspector set to work at once. He telephoned, as we have seen, to Sam Fowler, and tried to make an appointment for the following day; but when Sam said he had to go out of town for the day Blaikie, who did not want to seem too pressing, readily agreed to put off the interview till the day after, doing his best to make out that the entire matter was merely one of routine. Major Sayers, whom he also tried to get on the telephone, was away, but expected back the next day. Thirdly he got on to Inspector Whittall at Hampstead, and arranged to have a talk with him at once. Whittall offered to come down to Scotland Yard, but Blaikie preferred to go to Hampstead, in case there were papers he might want to consult.

Accordingly, with Wilson's questions neatly written

down for reference, Inspector Blaikie was before long closeted with Inspector Whittall at the Hampstead police station. He took the questions in the order in which Wilson had formulated them.

First, had the burglar got together any spoils as a result of his search of Mrs. Blakeway's room? The answer was that he had not, though the room had been turned upside down. Mrs. Blakeway's jewels, except for a few trinkets of little value, had not been there. Some she had taken with her to Lambourn; the rest had been deposited for safe keeping at the bank. Hers seemed to be the only room that had been disturbed, so it looked as if the burglar had been interrupted early in his search.

Nothing in that point, Blaikie considered, for it seemed that the burglar had taken nothing because he had found nothing worth taking.

Secondly, had the burglar had a bag, or any other receptacle in which to deposit his booty? Answer, no, nothing of the sort had been found. But he had had fairly capacious pockets, in which quite a large number of small objects could have been taken away. Actually, however, his pockets had contained nothing but the most ordinary objects. There had been no papers, and nothing that had in fact helped the police to identify him. There had been no sign of gloves, despite the absence of finger-prints on the window.

Further question, still under Wilson's "secondly." Had the burglar had any tools with him, or otherwise how had he succeeded in breaking into the house? Answer: this point had puzzled Inspector Whittall. No tools not belonging to the house had been found, but the window had undoubtedly been forced from the outside with a chisel, or some similar implement. There was a full kit of tools in the house, kept in a small room next to the butler's pantry. But no tools were found there that were not identified by the butler as belonging to the house. In reply to a further question, no, quite

definitely, there were no finger-prints on the forced window. The tools belonging to the house had not been tried for prints. Yes, the garden near the forced window had been searched, in case a tool had been flung away there, but nothing had been found.

That, Blaikie agreed with the local inspector, was a curious point, but they both thought that there might be some simple explanation. A tool might have fallen down behind some object of furniture, or even been thrown there by the burglar, in such a way as to escape the search made by the police. There had seemed to be no reason for making it specially thorough, as the finding of the tool was not likely to throw any additional light on the case. Still, the absence of both gloves and finger-prints was a curious feature.

Thirdly, exactly what steps had been taken to trace the burglar's connection with the revivalist meeting he had addressed, with a view to establishing his identity? On that point, Whittall's answer was full and satisfactory. He had obviously done all that could have been done; but, as the dead man's appearance at the meeting had been purely fortuitous, it had led nowhere.

Fourthly, how had it happened that there were no servants in the house? It was hardly usual, in so large a house at any rate, for all the servants to be allowed to go out when visitors were being entertained. Answer: Mr. Blakeway had explained that. Most of the servants had been sent down to his house in the country, as the Hampstead house was due to be shut up on the following day. He had allowed the butler and his wife, who were left behind in charge, to go out for the evening, because it would be their last chance of an evening out, as he did not allow the house to be left altogether untenanted, at any rate after dinner time.

That seemed to Blaikie a perfectly reasonable explanation, even if it showed unusual consideration on an employer's part—at any rate in a large house when the

problem of servants' evenings out was not likely to be a matter of concern to the master. So far, Blaikie felt, Superintendent Wilson's points showed no sign of leading on to any great fresh discoveries. He went on to the next.

Fifthly—but that was, as Wilson had put it, rather a complicated business. Mr. Blakeway had stated that the dead man, when he came to see him in the afternoon, claimed previous acquaintanceship. Had he simply volunteered this information, or had it come to light in some other way?

The answer was that Blakeway had volunteered it. But Inspector Whittall had an impression—he was not quite sure—that it had also come out in the statement made by the butler, who had been still in the house at the time of the dead man's arrival. He had the statement in his file, and he could easily look it up if it was of any importance.

"Better have it," said Blaikie. "The superintendent wants it, though it's probably neither here nor there."

Inspector Whittall resorted to his file. "Yes," he said after a while, "here we are. In Hatch's statement, 'The person said to me that the master would know well enough who he was, if I described his personal appearance to him. He refused to give his name, and only went on saying the master would know who he was.'"

"I don't think that was brought out at the inquest, was it?" Blaikie asked.

"No, not in that form. It didn't seem important, when Mr. Blakeway said he didn't know the man, though the man claimed to know him."

"I see," Blaikie answered. "Mind if I take that statement of the butler's for the superintendent to see? We'll let you have it back in due course."

"No objection at all," said Whittall, "though I'm blest if I see what you're driving at."

Blaikie didn't either, but he had to keep up his

dignity. "It is suggestive," he said darkly; "and now for the next point."

"Sixthly—no, that's about Major Sayers. I'm arranging to see him myself as soon as he gets back."

"You'll find him ready to talk," said Whittall. "A bit too ready, if you ask me."

"Got any statement of his, like this one of the butler?"

"Yes, it's somewhere. Here it is. D'you want it?"

"May as well," said Blaikie, receiving it across the table. "Eighthly and lastly," he said, "did you make any inquiries as to when and where the dead man got the rum?"

Whittall shook his head. "No," he said. "I didn't, and I don't see the point. Plenty of pubs, aren't there? And they all stock rum. As a matter of fact, I found an empty rum bottle on the dustbin at Sun House, and brought it away with me in case it turned out to have something to do with the case. But it didn't seem to be important, and I think I chucked it away. If not, it's probably still somewhere around."

Blaikie had pricked up his ears. "But surely," he said, "that suggests he got the rum on the spot."

"I don't think so," Whittall answered. "The dustbin was right away on the other side of the house from where the window was forced. It doesn't seem very likely the burglar ever went near it, though of course it's possible he prowled round there when he was looking for a way to break in, and chucked it away there. But I don't think so. I should say it was just part of the normal household junk."

"All the same, I'd like to have it, if it's still anywhere around."

Whittall opened the door and bawled "Cowtan." A constable came hurrying. "Seen an empty rum bottle anywhere about? It was part of the stuff I brought from Sun House."

Constable Cowtan grinned. "It isn't here now, sir,

because you said to chuck it away, but I reckon I know where it is."

"Where is it?"

"In my kitchen, sir. I took it home in case my old woman might like it, and didn't I catch it with her thinking I'd brought drink into the house?"

Whittall also grinned. "Has it been used, or washed out, d'you know?"

"I don't think so, sir. Is it important?"

"Well, Scotland Yard seem to want it."

Cowtan was evidently impressed. "Shall I slip up home and get it now, sir?"

"No," Blaikie intervened. "But I'm going in a few minutes. If it isn't far I'll come and collect it with you."

"It's only just round the corner," Whittall explained.

"I think that's all my points," said Blaikie. "Nothing else occurs to you, I suppose."

Inspector Whittall had no fresh ideas, and a minute or so later Blaikie got up to go. Constable Cowtan joined him in the outer office, obviously proud to be walking out with a real inspector from Scotland Yard. Blaikie was duly impressive for the few minutes it took them to reach Cowtan's house, in a little back street off the Fleet Road. The bottle was discovered, still intact and smelling faintly of rum, and Blaikie begged a piece of paper to wrap it up in. This secured, he set off back to Scotland Yard with his finds. He felt he had done all that could possibly be expected of him, but he had not much faith that his efforts had thrown valuable fresh light on the case. Indeed, how should they? For, in Blaikie's view, the case had been quite satisfactorily solved long ago. Superintendent Wilson was apt to make mountains out of molehills, and then go chasing wild geese over them. Not but what Blaikie had an enormous admiration for Wilson. He knew Wilson's powers too well to be anything except a

devotee. But even a devotee may venture at times to think his master is being a bit too subtle. That was what Inspector Blaikie was inclined to think in this case.

CHAPTER XIX

MAJOR SAYERS PROPOUNDS A THEORY

ON the following morning, Inspector Blaikie again telephoned to Major Sayers' flat and heard that the Major had returned and would be at home and free to see him after lunch. The inspector worked at a number of routine jobs during the morning, lunched early, and at half-past two was sitting opposite Major Sayers in a very small room crowded out with trophies and spoils of every sort and kind. Blaikie began with his familiar opening about a few routine questions designed to straighten the case out for purposes of completing the record, but Major Sayers promptly cut him short.

"Tell that to the marines," he said. "D'you expect me to believe an inspector from Scotland Yard would waste his time coming round here to ask me routine questions? No, my lad, you've got something up your sleeve, or you wouldn't be here. And I'm not surprised to see you either. Queer case altogether. That's what I thought right from the start."

"What was specially queer about it, Major Sayers?"

"I don't mind telling you what I thought queer. But it's for you fellows to draw your own conclusions. That's none of my business. Besides, Blakeway's a bit of a friend of mine—acquaintance at any rate—and it's not my job to be making trouble. Well, the first thing that was queer—to me—was that I'd seen that dead fellow somewhere before."

"Yes, Major, but you couldn't remember where. I've read the statement you made to Inspector Whittall."

"Oh, you have, have you? Well, I remember now.

It was in Honduras. That's where it was. I met him, because he was captain of the ship I sailed in from Honduras to Rio. I always said I was sure the man was a sailor. How I know it was he is because I came across an old photo taken on the ship the other day, and there he was as large as life. I'll get it for you, in case you'd like to see it. I should look at it carefully if I were you." Major Sayers went to his desk and, after burrowing for a minute, produced a faded photograph showing a group on the deck of a vessel. "That's me," he said, pointing. "And that's the fellow that got shot. As for who the others are, that's your affair." He fixed Blaikie with a penetrating eye, and the inspector, taking his cue, closely regarded the other members of the group. But they conveyed nothing to him, so he merely grunted.

"May I take this, Major?" he asked.

"Take it," said the major. "And you be sure to show it to whoever's on the case with you. It may convey something to 'em. Well, that's that."

"How long ago was it this was taken?" Blaikie asked.

"Oh, matter of a dozen years. Let me see. Yes, it'll be twelve years bar two months. There or thereabouts."

"You said something about the way the man was holding the revolver, didn't you? About it not being natural."

"I did. But, in a way, it was too natural. He was holding it just right. What surprised me was he should be gripping it that way, and yet not tight or convulsively. I should have thought he'd have been holding it much tighter, or it'd have slipped out of his hand when he dropped. But the doctor fellow took the line it was all right, and stuck to it that you never can tell with that sort of thing. So no one took much stock in what I said about it, though I'm still pretty certain I was right. You get on to the point. It's suggestive."

"We have it in mind, of course," said Blaikie intently.

"There were some other points you mentioned to Inspector Whittall, weren't there?"

"Yes, the smell of rum. You've got that. Then about there being no servants in the house, and did the fellow know there wouldn't be? But you've got all that too. And then there was the fact of the man's clothing being stained with tar. That showed me he was a sailor. It ought to have helped your people to trace him, but apparently it didn't, as he hasn't been identified, has he?"

"We think we know who he was," said Blaikie. "He seems to have been a Captain Jay, from Canada."

"Oh, you're smarter than I gave you credit for, even if you are a bit slow. So you've got the fellow identified at last. Jay, Jay. Wasn't that the fellow there was a message about over the wireless a bit ago?"

Blaikie agreed that it was.

"Well, if he was the fellow in that photograph, I suppose I ought to have remembered his name. Blest if I did though. Knew his face, but there's no name to it in my mind even now. One forgets things, doesn't one?"

"Lucky you remembered the face, sir."

"Well, if you know who the fellow was, my bit about the tar stains loses its point. Of course, what I meant was, look down at the docks."

"Mightn't they have been old stains? Captain Jay had retired. He was living away in the country."

"Those stains were quite fresh, inspector. I'll bet my last dollar that fellow had been on a ship a very short while before he died."

"Hm. That's interesting," said Blaikie. "His movements after he left home haven't been traced."

"A bit late to trace 'em now," said Sayers. "Ships don't stay in dock for ever."

"No, but we might make something of it. It's worth noting, at all events. I think that's all the points I'd

in mind to ask you, Major Sayers. Anything else strike you?"

"Quite a lot, inspector. But as it's inference, and not fact, it's really none of my business."

"I'd very much like to hear it, all the same."

Sayers appeared to hesitate. "May I ask you a question first?" he said.

"Certainly, but I can't promise to answer it."

"It's this. Your visit means that you people at the Yard aren't satisfied this Captain Jay died an-accidental death? Is that right?"

"I wouldn't go so far as that, major," said Blaikie, deeply interested.

"Well, I think he did," Major Sayers went on. "Only I don't think he died the way Blakeway said. I'll tell you why. First, though I can't prove it, I don't believe that revolver was fired the way Blakeway said it was—because of what I told you about the way it was held. But I don't want you to rely on that, though it was the first point that struck me. Secondly, I don't think the body ever fell down, when it was shot, in the position it was in when I first saw it. I think it had been dragged along and then arranged. But I can't prove that either. It's only an impression. Thirdly, I didn't think Blakeway's behaviour was natural. Too much looking round at us, to see if we were taking it all as he meant we should. Fourthly, the only one who even says he saw the shooting was Fowler, and he's so thick with Blakeway he'd say whatever he was wanted to, and not turn a hair. I didn't quite like his manner either. Fifthly, whatever he says, Blakeway did know the fellow, as you'll be able to find out. At any rate, he had met him before, though I've no proof he hadn't forgotten all about him."

"You can prove that, major?" Blaikie was getting thoroughly excited.

"No better than you can now. I only tell you he had."

"I suppose you realise you are accusing Mr. Blakeway of murder. That's what it comes to, isn't it?" Blaikie observed.

"No, no," said the major. "That's exactly what I'm not doing. I shouldn't have said all this unless I thought you fellows were after him for murder, as I felt you were bound to be sooner or later. Let me tell you, inspector, I don't for a moment believe that fellow was murdered."

"Then what on earth do you believe?" Blaikie asked. "First you—"

"I believe he was shot accidentally," said Sayers. "Only I believe it was Blakeway who shot him, by mistake, and then got panic, and tried to frame it so as to look as if the fellow had shot himself. I don't for a moment believe he'd commit murder—why should he, for one thing? As far as I know, this sailor fellow was nothing to him, though they had met before. I think he was a damn fool who was so afraid of being accused of murder that he tampered with the evidence. Can't prove any of it, of course, but that's my view, for what it's worth."

"It wasn't Blakeway's revolver," said Blaikie; "it belonged to the dead man."

"Who says so? Blakeway says it didn't belong to him. That's all. I didn't hear the corpse saying it was his."

"It was an American make," said Blaikie.

"A make you can buy in any part of South America," Sayers answered. "That don't prove anything. Blakeway was in South America as well as the captain."

"Hm," said Blaikie. "If it could be shown it was Blakeway who shot him, he'd have a bit of a job on to prove it wasn't murder."

"Or your people to prove it was, without a motive."

"There might have been a motive."

"Then what was it? No, inspector. Blakeway's not the murdering sort. It takes a fool to murder unless

he's got a damned good reason. Blakeway's no fool. Quite the opposite."

"Well, Major, what you have said has been extraordinarily interesting. Of course, it really isn't evidence."

"Some of it would have been if your Inspector Whittall and the doctor had had eyes in their heads. But you take it from me, it wasn't murder. It was an accident, the way I told you. And as for why I told you, I hope that's clear. If Blakeway did fake the accident a bit, but it was an accident all the same, you fellows'll be wise to let sleeping dogs lie. I told you, because I don't want you dragging a decent man into court on a charge of murder, when all he was was a damned fool. Got that?"

Blaikie said he had got it, but as he left Major Sayers he doubted if the Major had been so helpful as he supposed to his friend, Blakeway. For the inspector, after his talk with Sayers, was beginning to think that there might be a good deal more than he had supposed in Superintendent Wilson's questions. He was much keener now to see this Sam Fowler, and put him through the most searching examination he could devise. But that would have to wait till to-morrow, and then he would be in a position to report to Wilson, who was away for the moment, but expected back in the afternoon of that day.

CHAPTER XX

ANN KNOWS THE TRUTH

ANN BURTON was still feeling utterly dazed when Tom got her back to Bathease. Though it was more than twenty years since she had last seen Philip, there could not be the smallest element of doubt about her recognition of him. Nor was she less certain that he had recognised her, or that he had fled in consternation

from the sight. She was glad—oh, how glad—that he had fled, for assuredly Ann was no more ready to meet Philip again than he was to meet her.

All the way back in the bus, Ann's thoughts were busy with the past. They leapt back across twenty years as if they were a day. Ann's mind was back in Vancouver, more than twenty years ago. She was living with her aunt, for her mother had died when she was still a small child, and her father was most of the time away at sea. How well she remembered meeting Philip for the first time, and to all intents and purposes falling in love with him at first sight. How charming Philip was in those days? That was when he came to Vancouver as assistant manager of the Land Bank, which collapsed so disastrously a few years later. It was all as if it had been yesterday, though she had been only a girl in those days. There had been no Tom then.

Philip had not been long out from England when Ann met him first—certainly not more than two or three years. She remembered the story she had heard about his running away from school in England, and coming to Canada as the protégé of the man who had founded the Land Bank. Percy Stansfield was a great figure in Canada for a few years—till the smash. He was said to have had a wonderful *flair* for high finance. And he had been a tremendous friend of Philip's, and Philip had thought the world of him. Ann remembered how Stansfield had outbid all the other banks in Western Canada—it was something about paying interest on the money people deposited in his bank—and all the farmers and tradesmen and people with money to put in a bank had come flocking to put their money in the new Land Bank—Ann's father among the rest.

Philip was easily the most charming person Ann had ever met. He had the most delightful manners, and he was generous and always in a good temper. Ann was by no means the only girl in Vancouver he carried off

her feet. How proud she was when he asked her to marry him, and how jealous a lot of the others were when their engagement was given out. Her aunt was delighted too, for young Burton, the banker, was supposed to be quite a catch. Soon after Ann's father came back from his voyage, she and Philip were married, and they settled down in a little house that was, next to her charming husband, the pride of Ann's life. She had never been so happy as she was during the early months of her married life with Philip Burton.

But Ann remembered how, almost at once, she began to realise that Phil had something that was upsetting him. He was worried about something, and after the special visit he paid to Winnipeg, to see Stansfield, he came back more worried than ever. Ann could call clearly to mind those long consultations with his friend, Sam Freeman, who was Philip's boss in the Vancouver branch of the Land Bank. She had been fond of Sam too, though his repeated attempts to marry her had never had the faintest prospect of success.

Then Ann began to hear rumours—not from Philip, but from others—that all was not well with the bank. She tried to ask Philip about it, but he laughed her questions off, assuring her that everything was really all right, and that she was an ass to listen to what was only malicious gossip.

Then, one day, Philip didn't come home, and Ann, as it got later and later, became anxious. She went round to Sam Freeman's rooms to see if he was there, but Sam had not been home either. She tried the bank, but it was closed. Her father had put to sea again some days before and her aunt had moved away to Toronto when Ann got married. There was no one else she felt she could go to for help, so she spent a wretched night alone in their little house—alone, that is, except for the unborn child of whose light stirrings she was conscious as she lay sleepless through the night.

In the morning there came a policeman, barking angry questions. The night watchman at the bank had been knocked unconscious, it appeared, and ever so much money and bonds had been stolen. Freeman, as well as Philip Burton, had vanished, and the police seemed to think she must know where her husband had gone. Ann knew nothing. She was prostrated by the horror of the whole thing. Her husband gone, and suspected of stealing the bank's money. It was all incredible, and yet, somehow, Ann knew that it was all true.

The same day the news came through from Winnipeg that the head office of the great bank had closed its doors, and that the great financier who had raised it up from nothing in a very few years had locked himself in his own strong room and blown out his brains. There seemed to have been fraud on a vast scale, and it was hinted that Philip had been deeply implicated. The entire affair had been from the first a gigantic swindle, put through by the personal magnetism of the man at its head—the man who had been Philip's friend. The difference between him and Philip now was only that he had been just too late in attempting to make his getaway, whereas Philip and Sam Freeman, by moving in time, had got off with a very large sum of money. Every one said that they were certain to be caught. But days and weeks went by, and there was no news of them, and gradually the hue and cry, though not the scandal, died away.

Through it all Ann heard nothing from her father; for Captain Jay had sailed off, a few days before the thing happened, on one of his longest voyages, right down the coast of South America, through the Straits of Magellan, and up the other coast as far as the Caribbean. He was bound to be away for a long time, and there was no means of getting into touch with him, except by sending letters to various ports at which he might be expected in due course to call. As soon as

the police allowed her to go, Ann went to join her aunt in Toronto, and there, three months after Philip's disappearance, Tom Burton was born. The aunt wanted Ann to change her name, because of the dishonour, but Ann refused. She would remain Ann Burton, whatever Philip had done, and her son and his should be Tom Burton, and nothing else. Nor, despite an abundance of suitors in a land where women are scarce, did Ann ever even consider marrying again. She was wrapped up in her boy, and, though she called herself a widow, she took no steps to get leave—even if it could be got—to presume Philip's death, though the years passed and nothing was heard of him.

Ann believed that her aunt was not too well off, and she felt some compunction in living at her expense. But she could not help it, until she could get into touch with her father, and for more than a year no word came to her from Captain Jay. Before he did return her aunt died, leaving Ann her small property, which was just enough for her and the child to live on in a simple way. Then at last her father did return, very much down on his luck and full of accounts of how he had made a fortune and then lost it in Brazil, where he seemed to have been living most of the time he had been away. He professed to have heard, until his return, nothing at all of the disaster to the bank, in which incidentally his own savings had been swept away, and to have had no idea that he was leaving her in the lurch. But something in the way he said it, and in his iteration of the fact that he had known nothing at all about it made Ann feel sure that he was not telling the truth, and that he knew very much more than he was prepared to admit. She did not at all suspect him of having shared in any way with Philip in the swindle, but from something he said when he was under the influence of drink she got the idea that he had helped Philip and Sam to escape, and had been well paid for his risk and trouble.

Captain Jay, however, would admit nothing ; indeed, he always maintained strongly that Philip was certainly dead, or something would have been heard of him long ago.

Captain Jay had still his ship, and before long he was again at sea, leaving Ann and Tom to their own devices. Ann lived at various places, but chiefly at Toronto, where, as we have seen, she stayed for a time in Mrs. Markham's boarding-house. Her chief care was for her boy's education, and Tom's scholarship to Oxford showed that her stewardship had been of the best. Meanwhile Captain Jay devoted himself more and more to rum, and less and less to trade and seamanship, until the calamitous day when he piled his ship on a reef, lost his captain's certificate, and came home to spend his latter days with his daughter.

This did not at all suit Ann ; for she thought the old man was a bad influence for Tom, and with her Tom always came first. So, after a while, Mrs. Markham having gone to live in England, she packed her father off to live with her while Tom completed his education, with the mental resolution to follow him to England herself, taking Tom with her, as soon as he was safely through his examinations. For if the boy could establish himself in England and build up a career there, the risk of his father's reputation pursuing him would be far less.

Tom was brought up in complete ignorance, Ann believed, of what his father had done. She always told him that Philip was dead, and Captain Jay, as far as she knew, had never given the secret away. If she could prevent it, Tom should start in life with a clean sheet and without the unhappy consciousness that his father had been—perhaps still was—a fugitive from the law.

Gradually, indeed, Ann herself came to believe firmly—or to believe she believed—that Philip must be dead. He had passed so completely out of her life that it was impossible to think of him as still alive and active

somewhere else. His death became an article of faith with her, so that she lost consciousness of deceit, and was able to speak of it quite naturally to Tom and to any one she met. Only Mrs. Markham, of all her friends, knew her story, for she did not think that Mrs. Markham had even told Bob a word about it. Once back in England, with Tom too out of Canada and started on his new career, she felt safe. And now—she had seen Philip, and he had seen her.

Ann went straight up to her bedroom when she got back, and Mrs. Markham came to her there. It was plain to Mrs. Markham, as it had not been to Tom, that she had suffered some severe shock. And Ann, badly in need of some one to whom she could confide her troubles, was soon pouring out the story of her meeting with Philip. At first, the older woman was inclined to think that she must have made a mistake, and been deceived by a chance resemblance, and she tried hard to make Ann take this view. But Ann was positive, and before long Mrs. Markham too was convinced. But, naturally enough, it did not occur to either of the women to connect the man whom Ann had seen with the Mr. Blakeway who was Bob Markham's employer.

The question uppermost in Ann's mind was what she ought to do. She was quite sure of one thing—that she had not the smallest wish ever to see Philip Burton again, and that all her efforts must be directed—for Tom's sake—to avoiding any further meeting. Philip would be no more anxious than she was for them to meet again ; for he had the best of reasons for avoiding recognition, and had he not turned and run at the sight of her that afternoon ? For she was quite convinced that he had recognised her in that brief encounter.

Ought she to quit the neighbourhood at once, lest she should meet him again ? That would take a lot of explaining to Tom, who fully expected her to settle down, at any rate for the time, with Mrs. Markham.

And it might be quite unnecessary ; for Philip might have been only a chance visitor to Newbury, or might hasten, now that he had seen her, to remove himself from the neighbourhood. Probably he was engaged in much the same set of cogitations as she was, and equally uncertain of where she lived, or of the risks of seeing her again.

In the end, aided by Mrs. Markham's persuasions, Ann decided to make no move, but to stay quietly on at Bathease in the hope that her path and Philip's, having thus crossed once by chance after all these years, were destined never to cross again. But, if she did ever see him a second time near Bathease, then she would move at once, and on no account must Tom ever learn of the meeting. Mrs. Markham had been wonderfully kind and sympathetic about it all, and that was one thing that weighed with Ann in making her decision. Another was that it would look strange if she suddenly moved away while the police were still investigating her father's death. For Ann still meant to have that matter probed to the bottom. She was sure her father had never attempted to steal from Mr. Blakeway's house and, besides, Tom was even keener than she was to vindicate his grandfather's reputation.

Ann had tea in her room. Tom had gone out again, after coming up to see how she was. Mrs. Markham fussed in and out, offering consolation. Now, it is one of the most widely held beliefs among the human race that other people are interested in one's private photograph albums, and presently Mrs. Markham came upstairs, bringing a stout volume bound in red plush, which she felt was guaranteed to take Ann's mind off her sorrows. Ann thanked her and let the thing lie for a while unopened on the table beside the bed. Then she thought she had better just glance at it, in order to be able to make an interested remark or two when Mrs. Markham came back. She began with the

most recent photographs, and she had not turned back half a dozen pages when she came upon a group that caused her whole body to stiffen, as she stared, white-faced, at the open page.

The centre of the group was occupied by a large motor-car, and there was Bob Markham, opening the door to a lady, who was just getting out. Ann knew the lady ; it was Hilda Blakeway. But beside Bob two men were standing, and it was at these two figures that Ann now gazed in affright. For she knew them both. One was her husband, Philip Burton, and the other was his old friend and fellow fugitive from justice, Sam Freeman.

Even now, it did not occur to Ann that either of the two men could be the Mr. Blakeway for whom Bob Markham worked. She felt afterwards that she ought to have guessed at once, but perhaps her mind was too stunned to do more than receive impressions, without reasoning about what they meant. All she knew was that she could not now help trying to find out under what names these two familiar figures were now known, where they lived, and what they did. And something warned her too that she had better not take Mrs. Markham into her confidence any further, or let her know that in these two figures she had recognised her husband and her husband's closest friend. How lucky Mrs. Markham had never seen Phil, and that Ann had kept no photographs of him, save one, which she had always locked safely away from prying eyes.

Mrs. Markham came back, and Ann, with a self-command which surprised herself, began turning over the pages of the album, asking questions about one photograph after another, though she hardly listened to the eager and discursive answers. She drew nearer to the fatal page, and at length reached it.

" Why, there's Bob again," she said, " with the car, and I'm sure that's Mrs. Blakeway. Who are these two men at the other side ? "

"I think that's so good of Bob, isn't it? It was taken up at Hampstead, by Mr. Hatch. He's the butler there, and he gave Bob a copy. That's Mr. Blakeway's house at Hampstead—at least it's the drive. You can't see the house, because the picture was taken from there. But I've got a photograph of the house somewhere here. Let me see if I can't find it." Mrs. Markham tried to take the album from Ann in order to look. Ann held on firmly.

"But who are the two men?" she asked.

"Why, of course, you don't know." Mrs. Markham extended a finger. "That one nearer the car is Mr. Fowler—he's a great friend of Mr. Blakeway's—and the other man—only it's not very good of him, I always say—the other one's Mr. Blakeway himself."

"Oh!" said Ann, feeling as if she were on the point of fainting, though she was still hardly conscious of the terrible thought that was beginning to shape itself in her mind. "Oh! . . . I'm so afraid I'm coming over queer again, Mrs. Markham. I—could you possibly get me a drop of brandy?"

"Of course, my dear. I always keep a drop handy . . . in case, though I didn't much like having spirits in the house when *he* was about." Mrs. Markham hurried off to fetch the brandy, while Ann stared at that terrible photograph as, they say, a fascinated small beast will stare at a snake. For, if Philip was Mr. Blakeway, and Mr. Blakeway was the man with whom her father (she knew now it must have been her father) had been struggling when he was shot dead— The sentence did not end: Ann dared not end it, even in her own mind. But she really knew the bitter ending, as well as that twice two make four. The truth stared her in the face, out of that appalling photograph from which her husband was laughing at her with that old lightness of manner that had been his greatest charm. He had been a swindler then, but what was he now?

Ann made up her mind that, if she could stand in the way, no one else should ever finish that sentence she had broken off in the middle. It was not so much that she felt pity for Philip, but Tom must never know. Now, far more than ever, Tom must never know.

CHAPTER XXI

CONVERSATION IN A QUARRY

PHILIP, though his shock was the less because he had received warning, was hardly less perturbed than Ann as he fled from their encounter. For with Philip, far more than with Ann, everything—fortune, liberty, even life—was at stake. Ann had recognised him—of that, on further reflection, he was almost sure. And that would mean—what else could it mean?—that Ann would immediately announce that she had seen him, and speedily find out who he was. Then, as soon as his former connection with Captain Jay was known, the police would be after him for murder. On that charge, with Sam to back him up through thick and thin, he might stand a chance of getting the benefit of the doubt; for, though few would really doubt his guilt, full proof of it might be hard to come by. But even if he were acquitted of murder, would he be much better off? Would he not be promptly packed off to Canada on that old charge of twenty years ago, and there condemned to spend the rest of his life in gaol?

Philip drove furiously back to Lambourn. But before he got there he turned aside into a lane, parked his car in a field, and lay down in a wood to try and think things out. He must warn Sam of what had happened, but he did not feel like facing any one just yet, till he had had time to think.

Philip thought hard, for the desire for self-preservation, which was strong in him, urged on his thoughts.

As his panic passed, the outlook began to look less utterly hopeless. There was just a chance for him, provided that he was able to act quickly. For, if he could only get hold of Ann before she told anybody about their meeting, might he not be able to persuade her not to tell—for Tom's sake? He was sure she would be tremendously fond of Tom—Ann was that sort—and he was well pleased enough with himself to think that her old love for him, and his own power of wheedling, might not be without influence in backing up his appeal. It was a pretty desperate chance, of course, for she might have told others already. But she could not have known his present name when she saw him and, though she was almost certain to find it out soon if she tried, there was still a chance, if he could catch her in time, of persuading her, not only not to give him away, but even to deny his identity and maintain that she had never seen him before in her life, if any question of his past should be raised by any one else.

Philip went back to his car and started off, not for home, but back towards Newbury, where he hung about in the hope of catching a glimpse of Ann again. But there was no sign of her there, or of Tom either, and by and by he went back to his car and drove off in the direction of Bathease.

The trouble was that his only chance lay in catching Ann alone—above all, without Tom being about the place. Mrs. Markham he felt he could manage; it would be easy enough to devise some pretext for getting her out of the way. Tom was the difficulty, especially as Tom had seen him and talked to him, and would be bound to recognise him again. He dared not go to Mrs. Markham's house and risk Tom's presence. But at all costs he must see Ann at once.

As he drove, Philip was racking his brains. Finally, he stopped his car a mile out of Bathease and wrote a note, which, having no envelope, he folded and stuck

down with a couple of stamps. Then he waited for a passer-by in the direction of the village. Soon one came—a yokel on a bicycle. He was relieved that the man did not seem to know him. He stepped him and offered him a shilling to deliver the note at once to Mrs. Burton at Mrs. Markham's house. The yokel readily agreed and Philip settled down again to wait. When he thought he had allowed time enough, he drove his car nearer to the village, and left it close to a disused quarry, into which he descended by a narrow path. There he waited again, for he had sent to Ann an urgent request to meet him there at once without fail.

Mrs. Markham was just getting the brandy when the man arrived with the note. She looked at it up and down as she took it from him, but Philip had taken the precaution of printing the address. "You just wait here while I see if there's an answer," she said, and went up to Ann, bearing the note and the brandy.

Ann snatched at the note and read it. "Is there any answer, my dear?" Mrs. Markham asked, obviously filled with curiosity.

"There's no answer," said Ann, "but I do wish you would step up to the chemist's and get me some aspirin. I'm sure it's the only thing that will do my headache any good."

Mrs. Markham, though she still looked as if she wanted to talk about the note, readily agreed to do this, and Ann gave her the money. She went down, dismissed the yokel who had brought the note, and then, putting on her bonnet, set off in the direction of the chemist's. Ann watched her go, and then ran instantly downstairs and out at the back door, making for the place where Philip had written that he would be waiting for her.

As she came in by the opening of the quarry she saw him standing there with his hands in his pockets. His back was towards her, and his trim, upright figure was just as she remembered it all those years ago. Evi-

dently he heard her step against a stone; for he turned suddenly and faced her. He waved his hat and smiled. His smile too was the same across the years.

"Hallo, Ann," he said. "I thought you'd come. You've changed, haven't you, but not for the worse. Upon my word, Ann, we'd have made a good-looking couple still, if fate hadn't had other views."

She stopped some paces off him, and he made no attempt to draw nearer. "I had to come," she said.

"Yes, best to talk things over," he answered. "Told any one about seeing me? Tom, for example? You know I had a talk with him. He's come on well. Makes me feel what I've missed. I congratulate you. On Tom. All your doing, Ann. I don't claim any of the credit."

"Tom doesn't know," said Ann. "He doesn't know anything—about you. He thinks his father is dead. I had taught myself to think so too."

"Best thing you could do, Ann," said Philip. "So I was, dead to you, and meaning to stay so. It's rotten luck, my dear, our running into each other after all these years. It only makes one feel—what it isn't any use feeling. But you only answered half my question. I gather you haven't told Tom. Told any one else?"

"Only Mrs. Markham."

"That's bad enough," said Philip ruefully. "Probably all over the village by now. And of course she'll hand the glad news on to Bob Markham, and then . . ." He made an expressive gesture. "I did hope you'd have kept it to yourself, Ann. That'd have been like you. Remember how I used to laugh at you for being so secretive?"

"I assure you that Mrs. Markham will not tell anybody unless I wish her to—not even Bob," said Ann with heat. "Besides, she doesn't know who you are. She only knows I saw you."

"There's one thing, Ann, I'm not clear about myself.

We'd better have all the cards on the table. How much do you know about me? Found out my name yet, and where I live in these days?"

Ann inclined her head.

"Oh, quick work. Of course, you ~~were~~ bound to find out pretty soon, when once you'd seen me. Who told you? Mrs. Markham?"

"I saw a photograph of you—just now—with Mrs. Blakeway."

"Hilda. I do hope you like her. She took to you, the first time you met. Funny, you two meeting like that, and chumming up. Though I gather there's been a bit of a rift in the lute since then. You'll understand now, Ann, why I didn't show up when Hilda had you over to tea. It seemed just possible we might avoid—all this. Of course, you realise Hilda knows nothing. Awkward for her it will be if it comes out. Nasty business finding you've been living in sin with a—bigamist. Especially as Hilda's got very high principles. I say, Ann, you don't mind about Hilda and me, do you?"

"I mind very much—for Mrs. Blakeway's sake. You had no right to marry her, Philip."

"Oh, right! One gets so muddled about rights and wrongs, Ann. I remember how your love for simple blacks and whites used to weary me sometimes in the old days. Why not marry Hilda? She wanted me to marry her. She's happy with me. I'm dashed if I see that it's moral to go and deliberately smash up Hilda's happiness. What's morality, if it isn't making people happy?"

"You didn't make me very happy, Philip."

"I know, my dear. I'm sorry. I always was. But how could I help it? It wouldn't have made you any happier if I'd stuck where I was, and been shoved away in gaol. At least, I hope it wouldn't."

"Oh, I don't know," said Ann. "I don't know what I wish you'd done."

"I did the only possible thing, Ann." Philip answered. "It wasn't pleasant for you, and it wasn't pleasant for me. But I'd made my bed, and one had to lie on it."

"Don't let's talk about the past, Philip. It's no use."

"Quite so, my dear, though I rather think you began it. However, that's neither here nor there. I entirely agree. The question we've got to settle is: What are we going to do about it? You realise I'm absolutely in your hands. If you choose to say who I am, I shall be extradited to Canada in less than no time, and our Tom will have the pleasure of thinking of his father languishing in gaol . . . and the only satisfaction you will have is that you've behaved like a virtuous woman. By the way, when you say Tom knows nothing, do you mean—nothing? About the past as well as the present?"

"I mean—nothing," said Ann. "I don't want him ever to know. I've kept it from him all these years, and I did so want him to make a position for himself here in England away from it all."

"My dear Ann," said Philip. "If that's how you feel, isn't it obvious that you'd better say nothing to any one about seeing me? Square Mrs. Markham, if you think you can, and, if we ever do meet again, we'll both swear ourselves blue in the face we never met before in our lives. That suits me. It's obviously the way to keep Hilda happy. Apparently it suits you; quite certainly it's the best thing for Tom. Surely that settles it."

"But you . . . killed my father," said Ann in a low voice. "I know you killed him."

At this accusation, Philip promptly showed the utmost astonishment. "My good Ann," he said, "what an extraordinary idea to get into your head! Of course I didn't kill the old gentleman. I admit I told a few lies about how it happened, because of course I couldn't let on about having known him before; but I assure you

it's absolutely true he killed himself. He drew out his revolver at me while we were arguing ; you know he was trying to get money out of me. I made an attempt to get the gun out of his hand, and while we were struggling it went off. If you call that killing, I suppose you can say I killed him. But please believe me, I hadn't the smallest intention of hurting one hair of his head. Really, it was his fault for pointing the gun at me. What could I do ? I had to try to get the thing away from him. He was far too drunk to be safe, even if he didn't really mean to shoot. Really, Ann, that's all there was to it. It was far more his fault than mine. Even you must admit that. All I did was to defend myself. Honour bright, Ann."

Ann had kept her eyes fixed on Philip's face all through this speech for the defence. When he ended she said, " I don't know that I mind whether you killed him or not. I dare say father is happier dead than he was alive these last years. So we don't need to argue about that. But if they know who you are, the police will be sure you killed him."

" Then don't tell them," said Philip. " Surely that's obvious. If ever there was a case of least said, soonest mended, this is it. You see that ? "

" I suppose some people are just born without any moral sense at all."

" That's a point it's my turn to say I won't argue. We always did differ about morals, and arguing never used to get us anywhere. This conversation is meant to be severely practical. Can I take it you will square Mrs. Markham, and say nothing ? Please, Ann ! "

" Yes," said Ann.

" Then that's that. There's only one more point on my side. You and Tom need any money ? You know I've got plenty in these days."

Ann flared. " I wouldn't touch a penny of your money if we were both starving."

"My dear Ann," said Philip, "now you really are being silly. You've been touching my money for years. Who'd you suppose paid for Tom's education and your keep?"

"I did," said Ann, "with what Aunt left me, and what father could spare, before he lost his ship."

"Not a bit of it," said Philip. "My dear Ann, the money your aunt left you was my money—stolen money, if you like to put it that way. Your father and I arranged it that way because we thought you wouldn't touch the money if you knew where it came from. Your aunt had nothing, except an annuity that died with her. So, with your father's help, I made over to her what I could spare, on condition she saw you and Tom through, and left it you when she died. No, Ann, I'm not so bad as you thought me. I didn't go off and leave my wife and child to starve. So, as you've been living on my money all these years, why not take a bit more, now that I'm better off?"

Ann was more deeply appalled by this revelation than by anything Philip had said before. "It wasn't your money," she said. "It was stolen—from all sorts of people. Oh, have Tom and I been living on stolen money?"

"That's about the size of it, my dear. But I shouldn't let it worry you. After all, isn't most money really stolen money? But I'm arguing. All I meant was to state a fact. I'm offering you anything in reason you and Tom may need."

"I'd sooner die," said Ann.

"Perhaps Tom wouldn't. But we'll let it go for the moment. You'll always know how to find me now, if you do get short of cash. But if you won't, you won't. I think that's all, Ann, unless there's any other point you want to raise. . . . Very well then. Write to me any time, if you change your mind. Good-bye, Ann."

He turned away and began to climb up the path

towards where he had left his car. He turned back for a moment. "And I do congratulate you on Tom," he said. "That's real."

Ann stood stock still, her eyes following her husband, till he passed out of sight behind the bushes at the top of the quarry. She was still standing when she heard the car start. Then, very slowly, she went back to Mrs. Markham's house by the way she had come.

She found Mrs. Markham in a terrible taking. "My dear, wherever have you been? I came back with those aspirins, and there wasn't a sign of you anywhere, though I hunted the house and garden. And then your Tom came in, and he's gone to search for you I don't know where."

"I felt I wanted a breath of fresh air," said Ann. "I felt stifling. So I went for a walk. I'm so sorry if I frightened you, but really I feel much better for it."

"Why, and I believe you look all the better too," Mrs. Markham exclaimed.

"I expect I do," said Ann. "It was just the fresh air I needed. I shall be quite all right now." For, indeed, having met Philip and agreed to keep silence, she was conscious of a great weight lifted from her mind. It hardly troubled her that she might be screening her father's murderer—for she had only half believed Philip's denial of the charge. It worried her a good deal more that she and Tom had really been living on Philip's stolen money all these years. But, in the last resort, nothing counted with Ann's conscience against Tom's well-being, and her care for Tom made the path before her clear. Philip, she knew, would think he had persuaded her, for Philip was like that. Actually, he had had no part in her decision, except to make her realise more fully how she had made up her mind. First and last, Tom was the deciding factor.

Tom came back now, hot and breathless with looking for her. "Why, mother, where on earth have you been?

We thought you were lost." He kissed her affectionately, and she kissed him back with passion. She repeated the explanation she had given to Mrs. Markham. "And now, Tom," she said, "I feel so much better it seems absurd to think I ever felt ill at all."

"You shan't ever again, mother—not if I can help it. You should be like me. I'm never ill."

Just like his father, thought Ann. For it had been Philip's boast in the old days that he had never been ill in his life.

Philip, meanwhile, much relieved in mind by his interview with Ann, was heading his car, not for Lambourn, but for London. From the first telegraph office he came to, he sent a wire to his wife to say that he was unexpectedly called to town on business, but would probably be back on the following day.

Philip had several things he wanted to do in London. One was to see Sam Fowler, tell him what had happened with Ann, and also find out what had occurred if Sam's interview with the man from Scotland Yard had already taken place. A second was to visit Sun House and remove from the safe there to some place more private and less likely to be found by the police if things went wrong such valuable papers and objects as it seemed safe to keep, and also to pick up some baggage which he could deposit elsewhere with a view to a possible getaway. A third was to visit his London bank and draw out in cash as much as he decently could without the risk of attracting too much attention. Finally, if Sam had not fixed anything up, it would be wise to see if he could make any preliminary arrangements for getting secretly out of the country in case of need.

Once in London, he 'phoned Sam's flat, but there was no answer. He then drove on to Hampstead and reached Sun House at about seven o'clock. He tried to gain admission with his key, but the door was on

the chain and persistent pressure of the bell produced no response. Philip went round to the side of the house and found Hatch lying in a long wicker chair on the terrace, sound asleep. The butler woke with a start at the sound of his footsteps on the stones and stumbled to his feet, muttering that he was sorry, but he had not expected Philip to come up. Philip replied that he had only come to collect one or two things he wanted, and there was no need for Hatch to disturb himself. The bay windows of the drawing-room were open, and he pursued that way into the house and up to his dressing-room, leaving Hatch, still a bit bewildered and not much more than half awake, on the terrace.

In the dressing-room, Philip made a careful selection of clothes, which he packed into a couple of suit-cases and carried down into the hall. He saw Hatch hovering in the background as he came down the stairs, and the man came forward and offered to relieve him of his burden. Philip bade him undo the front door and pack the suit-cases into the car. Then he went into the study and opened the safe. He was going rapidly through the papers in it, selecting those which were suitable for his purpose, when there was a knock at the door, and, without waiting for a reply, the butler entered. Philip looked at Hatch sharply, for he sensed something out of the ordinary in the man's manner.

"I hope you were satisfied, sir, with the evidence which I offered at the inquest."

"Quite, Hatch. You said what you had to say, and you said it clearly. That's the essence of a good witness."

"I hope I said nothing, sir, that you would not have wished me to say."

"Of course not, Hatch. But your evidence couldn't be of very great importance, could it, as you were not here when the thing occurred?"

"You were no doubt aware, sir, that I gave my evidence with . . . restraint."

"Was I, Hatch? I didn't expect you to behave like an actor in a melodrama."

"I did not stress the point, sir, that the person who met his death had spoken to me at some length about his supposed previous acquaintance with you. He mentioned Canada, sir. I thought you might wish to know, though I did not think it my place to mention the matter in court."

Philip got up from his chair and faced the butler. "Look here, Hatch," he said, "do you happen to be hinting at anything in particular?"

"Only that I was thinking, sir, you might now be wishing to raise my wages. Would it be right, sir, if I reached the conclusion that you thought of doubling the salary which I receive at present?"

"It would be so completely wrong, Hatch, that I can't imagine how the idea ever entered into your head. If you aren't satisfied with your present wages, you can go. In some ways, I shall be sorry to lose you, but I hope that is clear enough."

Hatch seemed rather taken aback. But he was not to be put off so easily. "Where would you wish me to go, sir? To the police?" he asked smoothly.

"To the devil, if you like," said Philip. "You're being impertinent. I give you one more chance. You can stay on, at your present salary, if you like. If you don't, I'll pay you a month now, in lieu of notice."

"I shouldn't like there to be any unpleasantness, sir," said Hatch, not knowing quite how to meet Philip's counter-attack.

"Neither should I, Hatch," Philip answered. "That's why I'm trying to make it plain to you that you'd better not create any. You're a good butler, Hatch, or I'd sack you this instant. But if you think you are going to blackmail me, you are very much mistaken. I should like you to get that quite clear, if you please. If you wish to leave my service, you can

go to the police and tell them any damn thing you like. They won't believe you. On the other hand, if you wish to stay on here—at your present wages—you can mind your own business. Otherwise you go. I give you one minute to decide."

Hatch was utterly nonplussed. "Of course, sir," he said, "my only desire is to do what you would wish. But I thought—"

"Then don't think," Philip answered. "Get out. That's what I wish at present."

Hatch got out. He was no match for Philip face to face. But as for what he would do or say behind Philip's back, that was not so certain. On the whole, Philip thought he would do, and say, nothing; for he had a good job at Sun House, and nothing to gain by telling the police whatever it was he thought he knew, or suspected, about his employer. Of course, anger at the way he had been treated might drive him to the police with his story, but Philip did not think it would. He believed he had sized up Hatch rightly. But, even if the man did go to the police with whatever he had to tell, Philip preferred that to being perpetually blackmailed by his butler. For whatever Philip's vices may have been, lack of courage in facing an emergency was certainly not to be numbered among them.

When he left Sun House with the things he had collected, Hatch stood obsequiously at the door and watched him go. "I trust that what I said gave no offence, sir," he said, as Philip was getting into the car. "I felt you ought to know where I stood."

"Yes, it did give offence," Philip answered, "so you'd better not do it again." He put his suit-cases in the cloakroom at Victoria and then drove on to Sam Fowler's flat. Even if Sam were not back, he had a key.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BUTLER TALKS

INSPECTOR BLAIKIE caught Sam Fowler at last, at Sam's office. Once more there was that careful opening about matters of routine, which had to be put down in black and white before the case could be finally filed and forgotten. Sam, of course, was not deceived in the least, but he received Blaikie's mendacities with every appearance of belief, and flattered himself that he looked the sort of bluff, honest, good fellow who would conceal nothing and had nothing to conceal.

Blaikie, after many circumlocutions, approached the point. He wanted Mr. Fowler to describe exactly what he had seen on the occasion of the fatality. Sam began by explaining how they had all been sitting by the window in the big drawing-room when Mr. Blakeway had gone upstairs to fetch a book in order to illustrate some point about golf. He had been some time away, and at length he—Sam—had said that he would go and see what had happened to him.

Blaikie inquired if they heard any sound from upstairs up to this point.

"Nothing at all." Sam went on to explain how he had gone upstairs.

"Were the lights on?" Blaikie asked.

"Yes, both in the hall and upstairs." Just as he reached the head of the stairs, he heard an exclamation away along the corridor, followed by a thud and the sound of something falling.

"What sort of a thud? Do you mean anything like a shot? And could the falling object have been a body?"

"Oh, no," Sam answered. "No, to both questions. The first sound was more like a soft thump, and the thing that fell was quite light. Of course, I heard after-

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ward that both sounds were made by the book Mr. Blakeway threw at the burglar."

"I see. Then, so far, there was nothing that could have been a shot?"

"Nothing at all. There couldn't have been, because that was before the shot was fired."

"Go on, Mr. Fowler."

"Well, then I looked along the corridor towards where the noise had come from and I saw Mr. Blakeway just closing with another man, who was threatening him with a revolver."

"You say 'threatening him.' Did you actually see the man pointing the revolver at Mr. Blakeway?"

"You know," said Sam slowly, "that's a lot harder than you'd think to answer. I saw the revolver in his hand, and I saw Mr. Blakeway jump at him, and my impression is I saw him actually pointing the revolver at Mr. Blakeway. But they were moving very quickly, and all I can swear to is that the man seemed to me to be definitely threatening Mr. Blakeway."

"Did either of them say anything?"

"I don't think so. I don't remember anything being said. Well, I ran along the corridor towards them, but before I could reach them the revolver went off, and I saw the other man sort of crumple up and slide down to the ground out of Mr. Blakeway's grasp. Mr. Blakeway went down on his knees beside him at once, and I came up at that moment and we both had a look at him and saw he was dead. Then I ran off to fetch the others, but they had heard the shot and started to see what was the matter before I got to them. I met 'em on the stairs coming up. I think that's all there is to tell, as far as I'm concerned."

Blaikie put Sam a number of questions about his story, and also took him over what had subsequently happened up to the time when the police arrived on the scene. But Sam's evidence was entirely self-consistent,

and seemed perfectly straightforward. Blaikie, as he came away from the interview, was inclined to revert to his previous opinion that the whole affair needed no further explanation, and that he and Wilson were wasting time and trouble. But he was not sure, for what Major Sayers had said had also sunk into his mind. It did, however, seem to him that this Mr. Fowler was a very decent, straightforward chap, and that any explanation would have to be based on accepting his evidence as beyond suspicion.

Sam heaved a sigh of relief when Blaikie had gone. He found telling lies rather exhausting, especially in the hot weather, even when they had been too well rehearsed for him to feel any risk of contradicting himself. He thought he had managed the affair well, and the man from Scotland Yard had been much less formidable than he had expected him to be. He would reward himself with a specially good lunch, and a bottle of his favourite *Johannisberger*. He felt he deserved it as a reward, and could reasonably treat it as a celebration.

Superintendent Wilson got back to London at mid-day, and lunched before going to the Yard. The case on which he had been engaged had been brought satisfactorily, if ingloriously, to an end by his discovering that the series of thefts which had occurred at Lady Hinksey's, and had so alarmed her ladyship, had been perpetrated by her ladyship's grandson, aged thirteen, by way of a practical joke. Wilson had been rather out of temper at having been made to waste his time, for had not Lady Hinksey been a very important person the Yard would certainly never have been called in. Lady Hinksey, however, was the wife of the Chancellor of the Duchy and the daughter of an American millionaire, and her lightest word went. Wilson, who had a rooted dislike of Cabinet Ministers since his unfortunate

affair with Lord Ealing,¹ had extended his dislike to cover Lady Hinksey's ample person. But now that idiot of a case was over at last, and he was in a position to give the affairs of Mrs. Burton and Philip Blakeway some of his personal attention.

Wilson sent for Blaikie as soon as he got back to the office and heard from the inspector a full account of his doings, from his long interview with Inspector Whittall to his talk with Sam Fowler that morning. Blaikie handed over the statements and other papers he had obtained from Whittall's file, mentioned the empty rum bottle and reported fully what Major Sayers had said. Throughout, his tone was carefully and strictly non-committal. He reported what he had been told, but he made no attempt to embroider or comment.

"Good, clear statement," said Wilson. "You did everything that needed doing except one. You didn't see Hatch yourself."

"I didn't think it was necessary, sir. He wasn't there when the thing happened, and I got his statement from Inspector Whittall. Of course, I am sorry, sir, if I ought to have seen him all the same." Blaikie was rather aggrieved by this fault-finding. It disposed him, more than before, to think that Wilson was making much ado about nothing.

"It's remediable, Blaikie," said Wilson. "If necessary, you or I can see him to-day or to-morrow."

"I venture to doubt if it is necessary, sir, in view of our having his statement."

"That all depends," said Wilson, "on the view one takes of the case. What's your opinion, Blaikie? You've had more chance than I have of forming one."

"I'm inclined to think, sir, there's nothing in it—especially after seeing Fowler. He struck me as a perfectly honest man, and his account of the affair bears out Blakeway's absolutely."

¹ See *The Death of a Millionare*.

Wilson said nothing for a moment. His fingers drummed reflectively on the desk before him.

"Then you don't take much stock in what Major Sayers said?"

"A bit fanciful, isn't it, sir? That reminds me. I forgot to give you that photograph the Major gave me. The one with Captain Jay in it. I've got it here in my pocket." Blaikie pulled it out. "For some reason or other, the Major was very particular I should show it to whoever's in charge of the case."

Wilson took the photograph and looked at it closely. It had been taken on board ship, and showed a group of figures standing together on deck. In the foreground, in the centre of the group, was a shortish stout man with a beard—unmistakably a younger and less dilapidated version of the Captain Jay who had met his death at Sun House.

"You see the Captain in the middle," said Blaikie. "And that little fellow in the right-hand corner is Major Sayers. I don't reckon I know any of the others."

Wilson scrutinised the group closely. "Neither do I, so far," he said. "But some of those at the back of the group are pretty difficult to make out." He opened a drawer and took out a magnifying glass. He studied the photograph again. A faint whistle came from his lips. "Try with this, Blaikie. But no, of course, you don't know the chap by sight. However, you'd better have a try in case there is any one you know."

Blaikie took the glass and studied the group with meticulous care. "No luck, sir," he said; "were you expecting me to know one of them?"

"No, Blaikie. It was merely a chance. But this photograph is enormously important. It absolutely proves one thing."

"What, sir? I don't see it."

"That Blakeway and Captain Jay had met before. Because, unless I'm very much mistaken, that man at

the back, who's half hidden behind the others, is Philip Blakeway."

"My word, sir. So that's why the Major was so keen on my showing you the photograph."

"Quite, but of course it does remain just possible that Blakeway had seen Jay and forgotten him. Major Sayers had, very nearly."

"Still, sir, it looks fishy."

"It does," said Wilson, "fishier than ever. I'll hang on to this." He put the photograph carefully away in his pocket. "By the way, did you follow up Major Sayers' advice to make inquiries about Captain Jay down at the docks?"

"Not been much time yet, sir, but I put all the dock-side stations on to it. Nothing come in yet that helps. But that Captain Pollen, sir. His ship's at Limehouse, if it's worth seeing him. I've just got word."

"Certainly worth it, Blaikie. I think I'll see him myself. . . . Of course, Major Sayers may be right after all. This Blakeway may have been fool enough to try to fix things up to look more natural, even if it was an accident."

"Surely, sir, Mr. Fowler's evidence disposes of that idea?"

"Does it, Blaikie? I'm not so sure. I'm a bit inclined to have a look at your immaculate Mr. Fowler for myself. You see, his evidence agreeing so well with Blakeway's may mean either of two things."

"Of course, I see that. But, if you see him, I rather think you'll feel the same as I do about him."

"It's the fact that you took to him so makes me suspicious," said Wilson. "I always suspect charm."

"They say Mr. Blakeway's a bit of a charmer too, sir."

"So he is," said Wilson; "and when two or three charming people are gathered together, there's generally mischief afoot. But that's neither here nor there, Blaikie. What about that rum? Where'd he get it?"

"There hasn't been time to get any news about that, sir. Whittall's pretty certain the empty bottle hadn't anything to do with it, and our people here say they've had a look at it, and it's one of these extra special over-proof rums you'd never get at a pub or an ordinary wine merchant's. Must have been Mr. Blakeway's, sir, nothing to do with Jay."

"Don't you think, Blaikie, an empty bottle of over-proof rum found within a few yards of a dead man who reeks of the stuff suggests a connection rather strongly?"

"If you put it like that, sir. But how'd he get it? Whittall says it's most unlikely he was ever near where the bottle was found. It's not as if Mr. Blakeway'd have given him the stuff."

"Hm," said Wilson. "This case smells so strongly of rum to me that I'm going up at once to see if I can get a word with that butler."

"Shall I 'phone, sir, and see if he's in?"

"No. Much better catch him when he's not expecting a visit."

It was not, however, till late that night that Wilson was able to get up to Hampstead in search of Hatch, for just as he was on the point of starting he was summoned by the Assistant Commissioner to one of those pointless and unending conferences in which no one seems to be able to help saying the same things over and over again, with ever-increasing prolixity. It was dinner-time before Wilson escaped, and he had hoped to get home to dinner with Mrs. Wilson after his absence from town. But his wife was used to these little disappointments, and, when he telephoned, she did not even grumble.

Refreshed by dinner, Wilson set out at last for Hampstead, and thus missed encountering Philip Blakeway at Sun House. As Philip had done, he rang for some

time vainly at the bell, and finally went round in search of the side-door. This was not more responsive, and Wilson was on the point of giving it up as a bad job when he saw a man and woman coming up the drive from the road. He went to meet them and asked the man if his name was Hatch. The butler admitted his identity, and Wilson told him that he was an officer from Scotland Yard, and would like a few words with him. Hatch started, and seemed at first none too willing, for he said he thought all that stuff was over and done with long ago. But finally he admitted Wilson into the house, and to his own pantry, while Mrs. Hatch went off upon her own concerns.

"Mrs. Hatch and I were taking a stroll," Hatch explained. "But what might you be wanting?"

Wilson came straight to the point. "It's a small point, first of all. When the police looked round the house after the accident, they found an empty rum bottle in the dustbin. Do you know how it got there? It has been suggested that the burglar put it there."

"No, he didn't," said Hatch. "I put it there myself that very evening. It was a bottle of very old rum; Mr. Blakeway got a dozen of them given him by a friend; and I filled up the decanter before I went out and threw the bottle away."

"Where did you put the decanter? Had any of the rum gone next morning, do you know?"

"I put it in the library, where the master wanted it. He asked me for it, special, before I went. And, as for some of it being drunk, why, there wasn't above a quarter bottle left the next morning when I cleared away."

"Was the decanter still in the library?"

"Yes, and a dirty glass."

"Only one?"

"I didn't see any more."

"But I suppose there were other dirty glasses left by Mr. Blakeway's guests?"

"In the dining-room, yes. Not in the library."

"You didn't notice, by the smell, if any of the other glasses had contained rum?"

"I did, and they hadn't."

"Then that looks as if the burglar got into the library and drank the rum?"

"I should say there's no doubt he drank it. Mr. Blakeway only takes a drop of that stuff in a little glass, when he takes it at all, and I know for a fact none of the gentlemen who were here that night ever drink it. Mr. Fowler doesn't take rum, no more do the others. As I see it, the question is not whether the burglar chap drank it up, but when he drank it."

"You mean?"

"Well, Mr. Blakeway told me to tell him to wait in the morning-room till he was ready for him, and it was then he asked me to bring in the rum. So I reckoned he wanted it for his visitor. I thought he meant to see him in the library."

"I see. The man seemed very sure he knew Mr. Blakeway, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes. He called him more names than I'd care to sully my tongue with, only of course I didn't pass them on to the master."

"And he seemed sure Mr. Blakeway would know who he was when you described him. By the way, did Mr. Blakeway seem to know?"

"He knew all right," said Hatch confidently. "And he wasn't best pleased either. Whatever he may say now, he knew well enough who the old gent was."

"Mr. Blakeway's account is that, from your description, he mistook the man for some one else."

"Don't you believe it," said Hatch very positively. "When a chap knows another chap when you describe him, same as Mr. Blakeway knew this chap, he knows the chap, and you can put your shirt on it."

"Hm!" said Wilson. "You understand you are

making a somewhat serious suggestion about Mr. Blakeway?"

"I don't care how serious it is," said the butler in a tone of greatest vindictiveness. "It's been my belief he killed the old man all along."

"I don't think you suggested that at the inquest, Mr. Hatch, or to the local police. Has anything happened more recently to influence your opinion?"

"I answered what I was asked," said Hatch. "No call for a man to do more than that."

"But you are doing a good deal more now. Why?"

"No business of yours, I should say, Mr. Detective, as long as I'm telling you what you want to know. You're after him, aren't you?"

"I'm asking the questions, Mr. Hatch. Had a bit of a quarrel with Mr. Blakeway, have you?"

"He's a swine, and he's too much above himself by half." Caution reasserted itself. "But I haven't had any quarrel with him. I'm telling the truth."

"Well, never mind that," Wilson went on, in no doubt that there had been a quarrel, and not in much about its cause. "For whatever reason, you now wish to help the police all you can. You have just made a serious charge against Mr. Blakeway. Can you prove it?"

"No, I can't *prove* it," Hatch admitted.

"But you know something that you think backs it up?"

"It was what the old gent said," said Hatch. "That's what gave me the idea."

"Well, what did he say?"

"He said the—blighter—meaning Mr. Blakeway—would know fast enough who he was if I described him, and if that didn't fetch him, I was to say how'd he like a little trip back to Canada for old times' sake?"

Canada, thought Wilson. That's new in connection with Blakeway. It may be important. Mrs. Burton

comes from Canada. "Anything else he said?" he asked aloud.

"He said if I liked I could give him Ann's love. Only I didn't pass any of it on to Mr. Blakeway, you understand. I believe in keeping a still tongue in my head, unless there's good reason for talking."

If Wilson had known that Mrs. Burton's name was Ann, perhaps he would have seen the whole thing then. Perhaps not; who can say? He did not know. She was still simply Mrs. Burton to him. But the references to Canada and to Ann were filed away in his mind for further inquiry. It appeared that what had been said exhausted Hatch's fund of information, and, though he was eager to add his theories, Wilson had no desire to listen to them. He was in a hurry to be off, for he wanted to see Captain Pollen, and discover if he could throw any light upon Ann. But before he went, he took from his pocket-book the photograph which Major Sayers had given to Blaikie and passed it over to Hatch.

"Know any one in that group?" he asked.

"Course I do," said Hatch. "What d'you take me for? Why, that's the old gent who got killed."

Wilson nodded. "Know any one else?"

"Think I don't know my own master? That'll be Major Sayers, though he's changed a bit. And that's Mr. Blakeway. I say, where did you get that? That's an old photo. That proves the master knew him, whatever he says."

"None of your business where I got it," said Wilson. "I only wanted to make sure you'd recognise the man who called." He got up to go; nor would he do anything to satisfy the butler's curiosity. Two minutes later he was out of Sun House and looking for a taxi to take him down to Limehouse. For he had an idea that Captain Pollen would not be a man who kept early hours.

CHAPTER XXIII

SUPERINTENDENT WILSON SEES DAYLIGHT

PHILIP and Sam were talking things over—in Sam's flat. Sam had told Philip about his interview with the detective, and Philip had told Sam about the fright he had had when Ann recognised him, and about the treaty he had made with her in the disused quarry. So far, so good. Philip's encounter with Hatch was much less satisfactory, but he was disposed to think that the butler did not really know anything that mattered, and would in any case hold his tongue out of desire not to lose a good and comfortable job. In both these conclusions Philip, unhappily for himself, was wrong, and Sam Fowler did not feel nearly so cocksure about them as his friend. But he accepted the force of Philip's argument that it would have been fatal to buy Hatch off, and so get a blackmailer foisted on them for life. The alternative of killing Hatch, which has doubtless occurred to the reader, did not enter into their heads, for neither Philip nor Sam was of a naturally murderous type. Even if they had thought of it, they would almost certainly have rejected the idea.

On the whole, their conclusion was that there was no immediate need for flight. It would be a matter of common prudence to have everything ready in case the necessity did arise, and a good deal of their talk was concerned with the preparations Sam had already taken in hand. There was a captain, who sometimes carried their goods, starting off quite soon on a voyage to a number of South American ports, and he was quite prepared, Sam said, for a consideration to carry two friends of his who didn't want any questions asked. He had done a lot of bootlegging across the Atlantic in his day, and had no love for the law. Sam, of course, had said nothing of the reasons for his possible desire to

cross the Atlantic privately with an unnamed friend, and Captain Ankerström had asked no questions, except about the size of the passage money, which had seemed to satisfy him. Sam had arranged with him to delay his departure for as many days as they wished, up to a fortnight, on receipt of a daily refresher, and had also promised him a tidy sum by way of compensation, if in the end he and his friend should decide not to make the voyage after all. Meanwhile, both men had made excellent progress with collecting the largest possible amount of cash and bearer bonds to take with them, if they were forced to fly; and Philip hoped to complete this part of the preparations by a visit to his bank on the following day.

Sam decided to slip down to Limehouse that evening, to have another word with Ankerström, who was usually to be found at a public house there, called "The Goat and Compasses." It was after half-past nine when he reached it, to find Ankerström there with a couple of cronies. The captain drew Sam over to a far corner of the private bar, where they sat conversing in low tones.

A man came in, called for a drink, and asked if Captain Pollen had been in that evening. Apparently he had not, but he sometimes came in just before ten for a final drink when he had had business elsewhere. The newcomer said he would wait a bit on the chance, and entered into casual talk with the man behind the bar.

At his entry Captain Ankerström had grasped Sam's arm. "Know who that bloke is?" he whispered. "That's one of those 'tecs. His name's Wilson. One of the top men up at Scotland Yard. Wonder what he's doing here."

Sam stiffened. It seemed almost inconceivable that the great detective could be after him here. Inspector Blaikie had not told him, of course, that Wilson was on the case. Still, it was pretty upsetting, though luckily he had not met the great detective that after-

noon when he had come to Lambourn. Suppose this Wilson had followed him all the way from his flat? That would mean they were pretty hot on his and Philip's track already. What should he do? Cut, or sit still? Wilson did not seem to have noticed him and his companion, away in their dim corner. But, of course, that might be only the man's artfulness. Perhaps he was really watching them with some sort of reflecting mirror all the time. But did detectives do that sort of thing outside the story-books? Sam made up his mind to hang on for a bit and see what happened. He began to talk to Ankerström in a loud voice about horse-racing, and his companion instantly took his cue.

Besides, Wilson had asked for a Captain Pollen. Was there such a person, and could it be of him that the detective was really in quest after all, on some quite different matter? Sam slipped a whispered question in among his louder talk. "Ever heard of Captain Pollen?" he inquired. "That chap was asking for him."

"I know Pollen," said Ankerström. "Queer old fellow. Shouldn't put it past him to get the wrong side of the law."

That was reassuring as far as it went. Pollen did exist, and he was the sort of man in whom Wilson might be taking a professional interest.

The door swung open and a little man, with a much wizened face, came in. "Evening, Cap'n," said one of the other occupants of the bar. "Gent here's bin asking for you."

Captain Pollen cast a sidelong glance round the bar and seemed as if he would like to escape.

"Good-evening, Captain Pollen," said Wilson. "I wanted a few words with you. But pleasure before business. What will you have?"

"Charlie knows," said Pollen. "I don't seem to recollect your face though, mister. What might your business with me be?"

"Tell you later," said Wilson. "Private matter—between ourselves. Rum, I see. Good stuff rum, if you can stand it. I can't, I'm sorry to say. Yes, Captain Jay was always a great man for rum, wasn't he?"

Sam's grip on his tankard tightened. So the detective was after him. But where on earth did this Captain Pollen come in?

"Oh, so you knew Jay, did you?" said Pollen, looking at Wilson suspiciously.

"Why 'knew'?" Do you mean something's happened to him?" Wilson asked.

"I ain't seen him lately. That's all I meant," said Pollen.

"Does he ever come here?"

"No. He lives away in the country these days. Place called Bath something or other. He never comes here."

One of the other men in the bar intervened. "That Jay you're talking about?" he said. "Surely that's the old fellow you brought in here a matter of a few weeks ago? Kept yarning about Canada and South America, he did."

"Yes, he did come in here with me once or twice, I believe," said Pollen grudgingly. "But he ain't what you'd call a regular. That's what I meant."

"Happen to know where he is now?" Wilson asked. "I'm rather anxious to get in touch with him."

"I don't know nothing about that," said Pollen. "I ain't seen him for several weeks. If that's your business with me, I reckon I can't help you."

"Still, I'd like a word with you. If you are done with your drink, suppose we stroll along a bit together? Going abroad?"

"Don't know as that's your business, mister."

"We'll stroll along together anyway," said Wilson pleasantly. "I assure you you'll be interested in what I have to say."

Captain Pollen was obviously unwilling to go with Wilson, but Wilson, having once got hold of him, was not to be shaken off. Sam and Captain Ankerström followed them out into the street. Sam was utterly puzzled. As far as he could make out, the detective never so much as glanced in his direction. But clearly his interest in Captain Pollen was connected with the case, for had he not mentioned Captain Jay? Was it just accident, or deliberately done, that Wilson should be talking openly of Captain Jay in Sam's presence?

"I reckon that Pollen's not feeling too happy," said Ankerström sagely. "Once the cops get you, they don't let go easy." He chuckled. "Wonder what he's been up to? He's a sneaky, low sort of a cuss, to my way of thinking."

"Well, then, I can rely on you, Captain," said Sam. "Good-night, but more'n a fortnight I can't wait, not if you were the Emperor of China himself."

"That's understood," said Sam. "Good-night."

In a way, he would have liked to follow Wilson, whom he could still see in the distance, walking slowly along beside Pollen's shorter figure. But that, he felt, would be too dangerous, for he was no sleuth. He made for the nearest Underground and went back to tell Philip of the latest mysterious development.

"I'd better tell you at once who I am, Captain Pollen," said Wilson. "I am a detective from Scotland Yard. My name's Wilson—Superintendent Wilson. You may have heard of me."

Pollen clearly had, and it was evident that he liked his companion's presence less than ever. He wished he dared to make a bolt for it, but what would be the use of that? After all, he hadn't done anything really—not recently at least. Certainly he had done nothing serious about Captain Jay. Pollen reflected deeply. If it was Jay they wanted to know about, he'd better

tell them what he knew. "Then I can't think what you want me for," he said. "I'm an honest man, always gone straight and lived clean. You haven't got a thing against me, though I'm turned sixty-five."

"I didn't say I had," said Wilson. "Nothing for you to worry about, only I want a bit of information—about your friend Captain Jay. That's absolutely all."

"I told you I've not seen him for weeks."

"Naturally, since you know he's dead. You do know that, don't you?"

"I'd nothing to do with that," said Pollen. "What I read about in the paper."

"I don't suggest you had. But you saw him last—how long before he died?"

Pollen trudged along for a minute before he answered. "Same morning," he said at length. "But I swear I'd nothing to do with it. He slept with me 'board ship the night before it happened—what you know about."

"Oh! And why didn't you go to the police? You knew they were trying to find out who he was."

"It wasn't no business of mine, I reckoned, seeing I'd nothing to do with it. I ain't got nothing out of his death—except a good riddance, mebbe. He was always on to me to take him around in my tub, where he wasn't welcome. And he was always on to borrow money off me. I've got some of his things aboard, but you can have 'em. I don't want 'em."

"Did you know where Captain Jay was going that day—I mean the last time you saw him?"

"No. I expected him back that night, same as a bad penny. Only he didn't turn up, and I couldn't hang about for him, with the cargo all on board. So when he didn't come I sailed the next day. Wasn't till later I knew what had happened—along of seeing his picture in the newspaper."

"You had no idea he was going to see Mr. Blakeway?"

"I never heard of Mr. Blakeway. All I knew was he

told me he was on to a good thing, what'd make his fortune. And I was glad on it, 'cause I knew if he was he wouldn't come troubling me no more."

"He didn't tell you what the good thing was?"

"Only he'd found a rich relation what'd keep him in clover for the rest of his days."

"Relation, eh? Who's Ann, by the way?" Wilson slipped the question in quickly.

"Ann? That'll be his darter. She's called Ann. But she's away in Canada, ain't she?"

"Ann is Mrs. Burton? Is that right?"

Pollen nodded. "Aye, her. Many years since I set eyes on Ann. Pretty piece she used to be. But she'll be getting on, same as all of us."

"You knew her in Canada, then?"

"Aye, I knew the lass, when she was a little lass. Never set eyes on her after that. But I heard tell on her. She had bad luck, she did, along of her husband leaving her."

"Who was Burton, by the way? Or is he alive?"

"There's few can tell you that, mister. Burton was a wrong 'un. Ever heard tell of the Land Bank smash? Twenty years ago, it was, but there's folks in Canada has cause to mind it still."

"Don't think I have," said Wilson. "Was Burton in that?"

Captain Pollen told as much of the old story as he could remember, with some embroidery of his own. "Some of us always thought," he ended, "as it was Jay helped them two scamps to get safe out of the country. Philip Burton and Samuel Freeman they was—and no one's ever heard tell of 'em since. Leastways, I think Jay had, but he lost sight of 'em a good few years ago."

Philip Burton and Samuel Freeman—Philip Blakeway and Sam Fowler. Ann Burton's father killed in Philip Blakeway's house. Sam Fowler the chief witness to

prove it was a case of accidental death. It all fitted in to a nicety. Wilson thought he saw the whole thing now. He wanted to get away quickly from Captain Pollen. For the Captain had told him what he wanted to know, and now he had other things to attend to—promptly.

"I'll send a man round in the morning to collect Captain Jay's things," he said. "You have them ready. I must be off now." He left Pollen staring after him, and set off at full speed in search of the nearest telephone.

Pollen scratched his head. "Where's he off to now, I wonder? Well, all's well that ends well. I was damned afraid he'd got on to that little business of mine. If he's satisfied, so am I. Seemed as if he'd took an idea, sudden like. 'Slong as he don't bother me, he's welcome."

With which noble thoughts Captain Pollen shambled along to his ship.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DEUCE OF A POTHER

ALL his life Philip had trusted his instincts. When Sam came back and told him of his encounter with Superintendent Wilson at "The Goat and Compasses," Philip's mind was made up in a flash. Captain Jay had mentioned Pollen to him in the course of their talk, before its disastrous climax, and the fact that no less a person than Wilson was himself engaged in the case and interviewing Pollen seemed to Philip decisive. His instinct told him there was no time to be lost. Their best course was to be off at once, and get on board Captain Ankerström's vessel and out to sea before the final hunt was up. The money he meant to get from the bank would have to be sacrificed.

Sam was surprised at Philip's sudden vehemence, but,

always used to accepting his lead, he fell in after but a few attempts to induce him to take a less desperate view.

"My dear Sam," said Philip, "if I'm wrong, there's no harm done. You and I are called away suddenly, on most urgent business, to South America. If it turns out that the police aren't after our blood, in due course we come back, and offer the most plausible explanation we can think of. We shall have had a pleasant voyage, that's all. On the other hand, if my instinct's right—well, I don't exactly fancy the consequences of hanging around."

So, when Wilson 'phoned from Limehouse to Scotland Yard and ordered that an immediate watch should be set on Sam's and Philip's movements, and application made at once for warrants for their arrest, the two suspects were already hard at work packing their last things, and before the detectives had arrived outside Sam's flat, both the birds were flown. An hour later, they were on board Ankerström's ship, and on the following morning she cleared unostentatiously from her moorings, and was piloted down the Thames at the outset of her long voyage. She had no wireless, and her first port of call was in the territory of the Dominican Republic.

It was not till the following morning that Wilson received news that neither of his suspects could be found. The police at Newbury reported that Philip Blakeway had gone up to London on the previous day and had not returned, and the men who had been set to watch Sam's flat discovered that he had left by taxi late on the previous night. The taxi had dropped him at Charing Cross Station, and the detectives were at work trying to pick up the trail there. There was no sign of Philip at Sun House, though it was discovered that he had been there on the previous day—a point which Wilson cursed himself for not having found out in the course of his interview with Hatch. Nothing had

been seen of either of the men at their office, and nothing was known there of their whereabouts.

Wilson sent out a call to all stations and ordered the usual steps to be taken to keep watch at the ports. Photographs of the two wanted men were circulated to the police, and the news that they were wanted was allowed to get into the papers, and their photographs to be reproduced. Having put all these activities in motion, and set detectives to make special inquiries at the docks, Wilson felt he had done all that could be done for the moment—at any rate in London. He had plenty of other work on hand, and he plunged into it, while he waited anxiously for news.

Meanwhile, at Lambourn and at Bathease, there was a terrible to-do. Wilson had telephoned to Colonel Welsh at Newbury to order the watch to be set on Philip's movements; and Colonel Welsh, full of excitement, blurted the whole story out to his wife. The Colonel's voice was loud, especially when he was excited, and the Colonel's parlourmaid, who was in the next room clearing away, got a very good idea of the story, which she promptly retold, amid delighted exclamations, to the cook and the housemaid and the cook's young man, who were gathered together in the kitchen. The cook's young man, sensing an opportunity too good to be missed, left, as soon as he had the story pat, for the bar of the "Golden Pig," Sam Murgatroyd's public house up the road, where he in turn retailed to an admiring audience the story of the unmasking of Philip Blakeway. Thence the news travelled fast. It was borne into Newbury by a carter who had been among the group in the bar at the "Golden Pig," and there was just time for it to get well going in Newbury before the pubs closed, whereafter it continued to spread by way of informal gatherings in the street.

The story travelled round the villages too, and was passed on by servants to their masters and mistresses,

for there is nothing so pleasing to the humble as the misfortunes of their betters. In fact, the delicious scandal travelled with the lightning rapidity that scandals have, until, later that same evening, a dear friend of Hilda Blakeway's felt she simply must ring up Hilda to offer her condolences on the dreadful rumour she had heard. She was quite sure, of course, there was not a word of truth in it, but she felt she simply must ring up at once, to say how dreadful it was, the dreadful things people would say, and what was the real truth, because of course she wanted to be able to contradict all these dreadful rumours.

Hilda, utterly bewildered, had the sense to bang down the receiver. Her "dear friend" had mentioned Colonel Welsh as the ultimate source of information in the course of her incoherent remarks, and Hilda called for Bob Markham and got him to drive her over at once to the Chief Constable's house. Colonel Welsh was out, for he had rushed off to interview Ann Burton at Bathease. But Mrs. Welsh was at home, and from her Hilda learned the essential points of the story. Mrs. Welsh tried to be tactful, but it emerged beyond doubt from her circumlocutions that Scotland Yard believed that Philip Blakeway had murdered the man who was supposed to have been a burglar, and that this man was in fact a certain Captain Jay, father of the Mrs. Burton who was living at Bathease, and, horror of horrors, Philip's own father-in-law. This made Philip a bigamist, and Hilda no wife. The victim of his bigamy was not stated, but it became dreadfully apparent in the course of Mrs. Welsh's evasive presentation of the facts.

Hilda was utterly incredulous, and indignant beyond measure. She refused to believe a single word of the ridiculous story. She told Mrs. Welsh that it was a tissue of lies from beginning to end, and that the Colonel was a wicked man to be spreading about such malicious

falsehoods. Mrs. Welsh replied with spirit, and the conversation ended in a tone more suitable to two fishwives than to respectable matrons who prided themselves on belonging to the best county society. Finally, Hilda, breathing scorn and fury, slammed the door behind her and, regaining her car, ordered Bob Markham, late as it was, to drive her at once to Bath-ease. She meant to see this Burton woman and discover if she too was involved in the wicked conspiracy of which she was quite convinced she was a victim.

In the car, Hilda could not keep quiet. She had to talk to some one, and Bob was the only person available, so she talked to him, despite her pronounced views about the importance of mistresses keeping their servants at a proper distance. He knew this Burton woman. Was she the sort of person who would spread wicked lies abroad for her own horrible reasons?

Bob, who was all at sea—for he knew nothing of what had happened—answered with spirit that Ann was the last person in the world against whom any charge of that sort could be made. He sang Ann's praises and provoked Hilda, now in a nearly hysterical condition, all the more. She relieved her feelings by abusing Ann up hill and down dale, and Bob, quite forgetful of his place, answered her back with righteous indignation. He had received and accepted a furious dismissal before the car drew up outside Mrs. Markham's gate, where another car was already parked.

For Colonel Welsh, on receiving Wilson's message, had first dashed in to Newbury in order to instruct Inspector Longsight to take the necessary steps to have Philip Blakeway watched, and had then set out to find Ann Burton, in order to discover from her whether this almost unbelievable story could be really true. It was already late when his car drew up outside Mrs. Markham's house. Indeed, it was after eleven o'clock, and

everything was dark within. But the Colonel pealed at the bell all the same, for his impatience brooked no delay. It was Tom Burton who finally opened the door to him, not in the best of tempers at being routed out of bed.

To Colonel Welsh's demand to see Mrs. Burton at once he at first returned a blank refusal. But the pealing of the bell had roused both Mrs. Markham and Ann, and Ann's voice called to him from the landing to know what was the matter.

"It's me, Mrs. Burton, the Chief Constable," Colonel Welsh called up the stairs. "I'm sorry it's so late, but I must see you at once."

"Wait till I get some things on," said Ann. "I'll come down." She was in a panic, but she must know at once what had happened.

Colonel Welsh turned to Tom and inquired, brusquely enough, who he was. When he said that he was Ann's son, the Chief Constable at once plunged into his inquiry. "Then I can put my question to you, sir. Is it true that Mrs. Burton is this man Blakeway's wife?"

Tom stared at the Chief Constable in utter astonishment. He could only suppose that the man had gone out of his mind. "My mother, Mr. Blakeway's wife!" he echoed. "Of course not. What on earth do you mean?"

"What I say, young man," said the Colonel severely. "I expect you to answer me, not stand there making faces like a gibbering idiot."

"But you're talking such absolute nonsense," said Tom. "Mother doesn't even know Mr. Blakeway. She's never met him. My father died years ago."

Ann appeared, with a wrap thrown hastily over her night clothes. "Whatever is the matter?" she asked.

"Mrs. Burton, I have just received a most astonishing piece of information from London. I am informed that Philip Blakeway's real name is Burton, and that he is your husband."

Ann fell back a pace. She swayed and stumbled. Only by a tremendous effort could she command herself to answer. "I don't understand," she said. "My husband has been dead for a great many years."

"As I understand, Mrs. Burton, what Scotland Yard believe is that your husband is not dead, but has been masquerading here under a false name. Of course, I realise this must be very painful to you, but—"

"But how absurd," said Ann. "I have met Mr. Blakeway and he is not in the least like my husband. I assure you, Colonel Welsh, you must be under some extraordinary misapprehension. Really, the whole idea is too ridiculous for words." What she said sounded to her hollow and false as she said it, but what else was she to say?

"Do I understand you to deny absolutely that Blakeway is Burton, madam?" Colonel Welsh was obviously in a dither.

"Most certainly," said Ann. "As it happens, I met Mr. Blakeway only to-day, and I assure you I had never seen him before in my life. Surely I ought to be the best judge of who is my husband, and who is not."

"Really, you make it all very difficult, ma'am," said Colonel Welsh. "Wilson seemed so positive about it over the telephone."

"Then I can only suppose that Mr. Wilson must have gone mad," said Ann. "As I told you, my husband died many years ago—in America."

"If that is so," said the Colonel, much perturbed, "I must telephone to London at once and tell them, or they'll be making fools of themselves."

"Please do," said Ann. "We're not on the telephone here, but perhaps you could go home and do it."

"I must knock up the post office," said Colonel Welsh. "I must let them know without a moment's delay. I'm sorry I had to get you out of bed like this, Mrs. Burton, but you realise I had to clear up a question of

this sort immediately. I'm really deuced sorry. I must look like a perfect fool. But it really isn't my fault. It's all Scotland Yard's doing."

"Now it is cleared up," said Ann, "perhaps you will allow me to go back to bed. Tom, you lock up after Colonel Welsh." The Colonel found himself thrust, politely but firmly, outside Mrs. Markham's front door. In deep perplexity, he set off on foot towards the post office, which was only a few yards away. There he had much ado to rouse the reluctant postmistress, who was a heavy sleeper, out of her slumbers. At last, however, he got on to Scotland Yard, only to find that Wilson had gone home, and to be compelled to pour out his emphatic contribution on a sleepy and uninterested inspector-in-charge, who knew nothing whatever about the case.

Colonel Welsh was still at the post office when Bob drove Hilda Blakeway up to his mother's house. This time the front door was opened more promptly, for Tom had not returned to bed. His mother had gone back to her room, refusing to discuss anything with him till the morning, beyond saying that the whole thing was a ridiculous invention, and everybody must have gone mad. But Tom felt that there must be something more in it than that, and he had been far too worried to attempt to sleep. So this time he opened the door promptly, to find Bob Markham standing outside.

"Whatever's the matter, Bob? First the Chief Constable, and now you."

"Mrs. Blakeway's here," said Bob, "and she says she must see Mrs. Burton at once."

"Tell her she can't," said Tom. "Mother's gone back to bed, and I won't have her knocked up twice in one night. What does Mrs. Blakeway want?"

"Blest if I know," said Bob. "I think she must have gone off her rocker. She's heard some story about Mr. Blakeway having been married to your mother

before he met her. Of course, it's all rot, but she's in the deuce of a taking."

Hilda, too impatient to wait, had by this time followed Bob up the path. "Is that woman here?" she demanded.

"If you mean my mother," said Tom, "she's gone to bed, and I won't have her disturbed again with any of your silly stories."

"What does she mean," said Hilda, "by putting it about she's my husband's wife?"

"My mother never said anything of the sort," said Tom with heat. "It's a most abominable lie. My father died in Canada, years ago."

"Then what does she mean—" Hilda began again.

Ann had come down the stairs unheard. "Who is there?" she asked.

"Mother!" Tom protested. "You oughtn't to have come down. It's Mrs. Blakeway. She's heard the same silly story as Colonel Welsh."

Ann came to the door. "Will you come in, Mrs. Blakeway?" she asked. She led Hilda into the sitting-room, and Tom and Bob both followed. "What is it you want?" Ann asked.

"How dare you put about this abominable story about your being married to Philip?" Hilda said, beside herself. "It's a lie. It's the most wicked lie I ever—"

"I have put about no such story, Mrs. Blakeway," said Ann. "Of course, it is utterly untrue. Until I happened to meet Mr. Blakeway to-day, I had never seen him before in my life. That is what I said to Colonel Welsh when he came here this evening. He has gone now to contradict this monstrous invention."

"I said so," said Hilda. "I knew it was all a lie. "But—" Hilda stumbled in her speech—"if you didn't say so, who did?"



"I haven't the least idea," said Ann, "but I never heard anything so ridiculous in all my life." She began to laugh, uncontrollably, while Hilda, near hysterics herself, stared at her as if she had seen a ghost.

"My dear, whatever's all this?" said Mrs. Markham, who had come into the room unnoticed. "Mrs. Blakeway, what in the world brings you here?"

There was another knock at the front door, and Bob went to it and admitted Colonel Welsh.

"Well, well," said the Chief Constable, "I've telephoned to Scotland Yard to tell them it's all a mistake. So that'll be all right. Took me the devil of a time, though, to knock up that old woman at the post office. She must be as deaf as a post."

Colonel Welsh's coming had given Ann time to regain her self-control. "Wouldn't it be best," she said, "if we all went back to bed, now we've disposed of this-absurdity?"

Hilda too saw that the time had come to beat a retreat, for, though she was still in a condition of indignant bewilderment, she could not see on whom she could vent it any further. "Take me home, Markham," she said.

Bob turned to Tom Burton. "God knows what it all means," he said.

"For the Lord's sake, take the woman away," Tom answered. "I must get mother back to bed."

Colonel Welsh opened the door. "I'm very sorry, ladies," he said, "but you must blame Scotland Yard, not me. I think I'll go home."

He led the way, and Hilda and Bob followed. In silence the colonel and Bob got into their respective driving seats and started up their cars. Ann, Tom and Mrs. Markham were left alone.

"Come to bed, mother," said Tom. "We'll try to find out what it all means in the morning."

"Yes, you go to bed, dear," said Mrs. Markham, who

alone had an inkling of the truth. She helped Ann up to her room, while Tom, perplexed beyond measure and not feeling in the least like sleep, wandered out restlessly into the night.

CHAPTER XXV

RESCUE PARTY

SWIFT-FLYING rumour reached the ears of Sheila Tre-fusis too. She had been out all day with Roy Robinson, and on the way home they stopped in Newbury for a drink—just before closing time. In the lounge of the hotel a little knot of men, none of whom she knew, was engaged in animated discussion, and while Roy was away for a moment doing something to the car, Sheila caught her stepfather's name. One of the men was telling the tale to the others of how the London police had found out that Mr. Blakeway had murdered a man—some said it was his own father—up in the city, and the police were now scouring the country for him with a view to his arrest. Another said that he had been arrested already, and yet another had heard that he had made his escape. But of the fact that Philip Blakeway was wanted on a charge of murder no member of the group seemed to be in the least doubt. For, though Inspector Longsight knew how to keep his tongue still, as we have seen, the news was abroad in Newbury as well as elsewhere.

Sheila listened, bewildered, but not incredulous; for she had so deep a hatred of Philip that there was to her mind nothing impossible about his being a murderer. Her first thought was that Roy must on no account be allowed to hear this terrible gossip, and that she must get him away at once, and make for home in order to find out what had really happened. Ignoring the fact that the drinks had been ordered, she went out into

the street, where Roy was still bending over the open bonnet of the car.

"I don't want a drink after all, boy," she said. "Let's get home at once if the bus'll go."

"She'll go," said Roy. "It's nothing serious—only a faulty lead. Only I ought to get it put right, or it'll give clean out before long."

"Let's get on. Markham will put it right for you."

"But what about your drink—and mine?"

"They'll keep. Plenty when we get home." Sheila jumped into the car. "Let her rip, Roy."

Roy looked at her curiously, but he let her rip. They covered the ten miles home at a terrific speed, making the night hideous with the rushing clamour of the sports model which was, even above women, the darling of Roy's heart. When they were home, Sheila bade Roy put the car away and look after himself for a bit, as she wanted to talk to her mother. Roy adjourned to the billiard-room, where there were drinks, and began knocking the balls about aimlessly to pass the time.

Sheila was informed that Mrs. Blakeway had gone out unexpectedly in the car. Mr. Blakeway was not back, and not expected, at any rate, till the following day. He had gone to London. But Master Gregory was somewhere about. Sheila went in search of her brother. Perhaps he knew. She found him in the library, moving restlessly about.

"Gregory, whatever is all this about our step-father?"

"What about him?" said Gregory. "He's gone to London, hasn't he?"

"The police are looking for him, to arrest him for murder. Everybody's talking about it. It's too awful. Roy's bound to hear about it. Whatever are we to do?"

"Who cares about Roy?" said Gregory. He was gradually taking in the news. "But, I say, it can't be true. It must be all some horrible mistake. As if

Philip would. . . . Really, Sheila, you don't believe a word of it, do you?"

"I'm sure it's true. That's the awful thing—though it would be bad enough even if it weren't true, having all this talk, and your stepfather put in gaol. It's too bad of mother, marrying a man like that behind our backs, when any one ought to have been able to see he was a crook."

"It's not true," said Gregory. "It couldn't be true. Phil's been so jolly decent to me. I—I like him an awful lot, you know."

"I hate him," said Sheila. "But that isn't the point. It's Roy I'm thinking of."

"You and your Roy!" A sudden thought struck Gregory. "I say, I suppose that's why mother rushed off in the devil of a taking."

"Where's she gone?"

"Dunno. Some one else might. Let's ring and ask."

The ring produced a footman, who had heard Mrs. Blakeway tell Markham to drive to Colonel Welsh's house.

"What's she gone there for? To see the Chief Constable. Whew! That looks as if there's something in it," Gregory reflected. "Of course, I don't mean it's true, but some one's been telling lies about—"

"Of course it's true. It really is too bad. It's not fair on me," said Sheila.

But Gregory was thinking of Phil, the new friend who had so lately won his affection. "I say, Phil must have gone off to London without knowing a word about the police being after him. He ought to be warned. Wonder where he is. Sun House, or staying with Sam Fowler, most likely. I'd better 'phone."

Sheila observed that the police were sure to be listening in on all telephone calls from the house. That was what they always did in the books.

"Then I s'pose I'd only be making things worse," said the boy, greatly dashed. "But I can't stand not doing anything at all."

"Of course you can't do anything. And I do think, instead of bothering about him, you might be trying to think what we ought to do for ourselves," said Sheila.

Roy Robinson, weary of potting the red, wandered in. He sensed something unusual in the atmosphere. "Hallo," he said. "Anything up?"

"Nothing at all," said Sheila. "Only Gregory's being a pig as usual. Boys are so selfish. Get me a drink, Roy. I'm starving."

"Plenty in the billiard-room."

They went along to find them. Evidently Sheila's first thought was that nothing must be said in front of Roy at present.

Gregory, left alone again, felt as if his world was in ruins. He could not believe that his stepfather had been guilty of murder, but he was frightened all the same. Above all, he felt that Philip ought to be warned that the police were after him. But, if it was useless to telephone, what could he do? He took a resolution. He could drive quite decently now, thanks to Philip's tuition, though he was still too young to have a driving licence. Very well. He would drive to London, find Philip, and warn him. That was what a true friend clearly ought to do. He wished he knew more, but probably Philip would be able to guess what the situation was. He wished he had Bob Markham to help him, but Bob was out driving his mother. He would have to take the other car, the one Philip usually drove.

Gregory made for the garage. There was no one about. But the only car it contained was Roy Robinson's expensive sports model, which he had never driven in his life. Of course, Philip had driven the other car up to London himself. Well, it would have to be Roy's. Weren't all cars much alike to drive,

when you once had the trick ? Gregory fumbled a little with Roy's car, found where the gears were—or thought he did—and managed to get the engine going, and to back her out of the garage without making too much noise. Slowly at first, because he was frightened of the strange monster, he drove down the drive, and out into the open road. He turned the car towards London. He knew the first bit of the way well enough. No one noticed his or the car's absence till the morning. Or rather, though Bob, when he came back, noticed that Roy's car was not there, he only supposed that it had not returned yet, and attached no importance to it being out so late.

Ann, left at length alone in her bedroom by Mrs. Markham, had much to think of. It was easy enough to deny that Philip was her husband, and to convince a man like Colonel Welsh that she was speaking the truth. But would this great detective up in London, who had apparently somehow hit on the truth for himself, be so ready to accept her denials ? Would he not easily fathom her motives for denying the truth ? And had he perhaps proofs of Philip's identity sufficient to confute her ? In any event, if the question was once brought to public trial, there were certainly dozens of people who would be able to identify Philip Blakeway with the absconding bank manager of twenty years ago. Her denials would be useless. Tom was bound to get to know all about his father now. And there would be more horrors to come. The trial, the execution, Tom branded through life as the son of a murderer who had killed his own wife's father.

Must it come to that, or could she do anything to mitigate, if not to avert, disaster ? It was hard to see anything that she could do, but one thing gradually became clear in her mind. She must somehow get to London and see this great detective who was in charge

of the case, in order to persuade him, if she could, that he was making a sheer mistake, and, if not, at least to find out how much he knew. For until she could find out that, how could she tell what was the best course for her to follow, or how much it was indispensable that she should let Tom know, in order to prevent his hearing it first from some other source? But how could she get to London? It was the middle of the night, and there was no chance of a train till the following day. But Ann felt that she must act at once, if she was to act at all. Her one hope lay in the aged Ford, which was the only hireable car in the village. Its owner would have long gone to bed, but if she routed him out, and offered him a lot of money to take her to London at once, perhaps he could be persuaded to agree. Ann dressed quickly, in her outdoor clothes, took all the money she had in the house, and went very silently on tiptoe down the creaking stairs and out of the front door. Mrs. Markham heard her; but, thinking it was Tom coming up to bed, she only turned over and made another attempt to sleep. Tom was still out on the downs, trying to walk off the turmoil of his perplexed and half-stunned mind.

The owner of the Ford car proved hard to persuade, and expensive. But at length Ann's lavish offers did the trick. Grumbling, he got out the ancient car and set off towards London.

Ten miles along the road they passed an abandoned sports car by the roadside, for Roy's faulty lead had given out, and all Gregory's frantic efforts to get the car to move had been fruitless. There was no sign of him near it, however, and the Ford passed by without stopping. It was two miles farther on that they were flagged by a solitary figure, trudging along the dark road under the light of the moon. "You aren't going to London, are you? Because if you are, I'd be most tremendously grateful if you'd give me a lift, at least

part of the way. I've simply got to get there, and my car won't go."

The driver of the Ford was for pressing on and refusing to take the wayfarer. But Ann had a kind heart. She called to the boy to get in, and he clambered into the car beside her. She had no idea who he was, for, though she had met him on the occasion of his visit to Bathease with his mother, she had not then taken much notice of him, and now it was dark and her mind was on other things. She asked him why was he in such a hurry to get to London, and then repented of her question as an impertinence. Gregory did not tell her; he only said that there was some one he had to see there at once on private business.

As he spoke, it came over Ann that she had seen him before. She looked at him more closely. "Why," she said, "I believe you're Mrs. Blakeway's son."

"Yes, I am," said Gregory. "Only I hoped you wouldn't recognise me. You're Mrs. Burton. I remember you. I say, what are you going to London for at this time of night?"

"I have private business too," said Ann. They fell silent for a time.

Gregory spoke again. "It isn't about . . . my step-father, is it?" he asked. "Your business, I mean?"

"Why should it be?"

"Only, they were saying . . . I thought it might be. But you don't know him, do you?"

"Mr. Blakeway and I have barely met."

"Then it isn't that?"

"Has your business anything to do with Mr. Blakeway?" Ann asked.

"Oh, no," said Gregory. "Of course it hasn't."

They went on in silence.

"Are you going all the way to London?" It was again Gregory who spoke.

"Yes, all the way. Where do you want to be put down?"

"I expect I shall have to go to Hampstead," said the boy. "But I'm going somewhere else first. Somewhere in Westminster."

"I'm going to Westminster too," said Ann.

"That's jolly lucky. You can put me down there."

Another silence.

"I say," said Gregory, "may I ask you something? If you found out some one you were very fond of had done something awful, what would you do?"

"That depends on how fond I was of him, and what he'd done."

"Suppose—I'm only supposing, you know—suppose he'd killed somebody—on purpose?"

"I think it would still depend on how fond of him I was—oh, and on lots of other things. You see, there might be some one else I was fond of who would be affected by what I did."

"Yes, I see that. But I do think one ought to stick by one's friends, whatever they've done. Don't you?"

"I like loyalty," said Ann. "But it can be strained too far."

"I feel sure he can't have done anything really bad, really," said the boy, thinking aloud, and forgetting that he had been stating an imaginary case.

"I wish I could feel sure of that," said Ann.

Gregory was suddenly visited by a thought which had utterly escaped him so far. Wasn't this Mrs. Burton Captain Jay's daughter? And wasn't Captain Jay the man they said Philip had killed? She must be Philip's bitterest enemy, if she knew about it. And, of course, she was going to London to help to get Philip put in gaol. He drew away from her in the car.

"I think, if you don't mind, I'd rather get out and walk," he said. For Gregory had simple mental reactions. He could not bear the thought that he was getting a lift from the enemy.

"Nonsense," said Ann. "You want to get to London, don't you? I thought you were in such a hurry."

"All the same, I'd rather walk."

"Nonsense," said Ann again. "I can't put you down in the road in the middle of the night, miles from anywhere."

Gregory did not insist. He felt he had done enough for honour. But they completed the journey to London in silence. The car drew up outside Scotland Yard at three in the morning. "I don't expect there'll be any one here, ma'am," said the driver as he opened the door. "Not at this ungodly hour. Will you be wanting me to wait?"

"No, thank you." Ann had the promised fare ready. She paid the man, and he drove away.

"I say. What is this place?" asked Gregory, staring up at the big building. "I'm not sure just where we are?"

"Scotland Yard," said Ann, and, with a yelp of dismay, Gregory left her and fled into the night.

CHAPTER XXVI

SUPERINTENDENT WILSON SUMS UP

WILSON was roused early from bed by the telephone. "Yes, what is it?" He received the news that the two wanted men had escaped, and that no trace of them had been found, and that there had been a lady, a Mrs. Burton, who had arrived at Scotland Yard in the small hours, and insisted on waiting for him. He dressed hurriedly, gulped down a hasty breakfast of tea and bread and butter, and set out for his office post-haste.

Ann looked haggard with her long vigil. "I wanted to see you at once," she said, "because people are putting about a most absurd story, and they say it

comes from you. I want to know if it does. Have you been saying that Mr. Blakeway is really—my husband?"

"How did the—rumour reach you, Mrs. Burton?" Wilson temporised.

"That's not the point," said Ann. "It's all over the place. I want an answer to my question."

"Wouldn't it be more useful if you told me whether Mr. Blakeway is your husband or not?" said Wilson gently.

"Of course he's not. My husband has been dead many years. He died in—Brazil."

"That's very interesting," said Wilson. "I suppose you have proof of his death, Mrs. Burton?"

"Father was with him when he died," said Ann. "Why should I have to prove it, when I know he is dead? I think it is you who ought to have proof, before you begin spreading wicked stories about."

"I might be more easily convinced by proof than by assertion. If you have proof, you had clearly better produce it."

"But what has proving it got to do with it? Even if my husband were alive, that wouldn't mean he was Mr. Blakeway. Surely you will allow me to know who is my husband? I tell you, positively, Mr. Blakeway is not. Isn't that enough?"

"Not quite, I'm afraid. You have not met Mr. Blakeway, I understand?"

"Yes, I have," said Ann. "I was talking to him only the other day. I tell you he is not my husband, Mr. Wilson. He's not really in the least like him. Oh, how can you be so absurd?"

"Of course, Mrs. Burton, we shall attach due weight to what you say. May I ask where you and Mr. Blakeway met?"

"It was in the country, near where I am living. Simply a chance meeting. I had never seen him before in my life. But he introduced himself, because, you see, I know Mrs. Blakeway."

"When was the meeting?"

"It was yesterday," said Ann. "But I don't see it matters when it was."

"And you are prepared to swear, if necessary in court, that you had never seen Mr. Blakeway before that? I should advise you to think very carefully before you answer, Mrs. Burton."

"Of course I'm ready to swear it," said Ann vehemently.

"Then I don't think there is anything more to be said at present, Mrs. Burton." Wilson rose from his chair. "But your coming has been most helpful."

"I want to know why you ever got this absurd idea into your head," said Ann. She was not prepared to be dismissed so easily. "What proof do you think you can possibly have of Ph—Mr. Blakeway being my husband?"

"That, Mrs. Burton, is my business," said Wilson gravely. He pressed a bell. "Will you show this lady out, Stodgers?"

Ann got up reluctantly. How did one pump a detective? She had no idea. Wilson bowed to her politely. She went.

"Very interesting," Wilson muttered softly to himself. To him at any rate Ann's motives were perfectly plain. But of course her denials were quite futile. They would not stand examination in court. Besides, if he had been in any doubt, Ann's manner gave her away. Ann was not an accomplished liar. She had not Philip's flair.

Gregory tried Sam Fowler's flat first. But he never got upstairs, for when he mentioned Sam's name, the janitor, who was in the hall despite the untoward hour, at once told him that the place was in the occupation of the police. Waiting to hear no more, Gregory fled again. He must get to Hampstead somehow, and as,

in the small hours, the Tube was still shut, and he had no money to pay for a taxi, even if he had been able to find one, there was nothing for it but to walk. Gregory set out to trudge all the way up to Hampstead and it was already six o'clock when he at last found himself in the neighbourhood of Sun House.

But, when he had got there, he did not know what to do. There was still no sign of movement about the place, and he was afraid that if he went and knocked boldly at the door it might be opened to him by a policeman—and any member of the police force was the last sort of person Gregory wanted to see. Probably he was on a wild-goose chase, and Philip was not at Sun House at all. But he must make sure. He entered the grounds circumspectly, after reconnoitring the front way, by getting over the garden wall at the side, into the shrubbery. Thence he approached the back of the house, but there was no more sign of movement on that side, and the boy made up his mind to wait. He went back into the shrubbery and lay down, watching the house, and there, out of sheer exhaustion, he fell asleep.

The sun was high in the heavens when he woke, and some one had drawn up the blinds in some of the rooms. Gregory crept round towards the back door. He saw Mrs. Hatch, washing crockery at the sink, through the open scullery window. He called to her softly.

"Lord, Master Gregory, you gave me a turn. What-ever are you doing here?"

"Is my stepfather here?" Gregory whispered.

Mrs. Hatch threw up her hands. "No, Master Gregory, and I'm sure I don't know what the world's coming to, what with the place that full of police and them searching all over the house for clues that aren't there."

"You don't know where he is, do you?"

"No, that I don't. Nobody knows. They are saying

he's run away, and not left a trace behind him. I'm sure I never thought I should live to get my wages from a wicked murderer."

"He's not a wicked murderer," said Gregory. "I'm sure he's not."

"That's all you know about it, Master Gregory," said Mrs. Hatch. "I hope they catch him, or I shan't be able to sleep quiet in my bed."

"They shan't catch him, if I can help it," said Gregory stoutly. But there was nothing to be gained by staying to listen to more of Mrs. Hatch's outpourings. Gregory stole away and got over the garden wall again unseen. What could he do if Philip had fled? Nothing, except go back to Lambourn and confess his escapade. Gregory walked disconsolately all the way to Paddington, for he had just enough money left to buy his ticket back. He was tired, dispirited, and above all hungry, for he had had no breakfast. Some hours later he slunk into his own house at Lambourn by the back way, made straight for the larder and took the edge off his raving appetite with cold sausages and milk.

"They can't possibly get far," said Inspector Blaikie. "We've got every outlet watched and every police station in the country on the lookout. And they had hardly any start."

Superintendent Wilson shook his head. "Remember Pasquett?" he said. "He had even less start, and he got clean away.¹ Besides, these two are old hands. They've done it before, and they know the ropes."

"In Canada," said Blaikie. "The police organisation over there isn't anything like as good as ours. Besides, that was twenty years ago."

"All the same," Wilson answered, "I'm not too confident. Got that list of ships that cleared out of the Thames last night, Blaikie?"

¹See *The Death of a Millionaire*.

Blaikie handed it over. It included the name of Captain Ankerström's vessel, *The Pride of England*. Wilson ran his eye down the list. "Any response to the wireless messages?"

"Nothing so far, sir. But several of them haven't got wireless."

"Four bound for South America or the Caribbean, I see. One of those four, I should say."

"You do think they've got off by sea, sir?"

"It seems the likeliest. I've been reading up the old Canadian reports, and I don't think there's much doubt that's how they did it before. You know that trick criminals have of repeating themselves, Blaikie."

"It'll be a fair sickener if they do get off, sir—after all that you found out."

"All in the day's work, Blaikie. Nice woman that Mrs. Burton. I'm sorry for her."

"Think she's still in love with him, sir, and that's why she wanted to get him off?"

"Not exactly, Blaikie. I think she's in love with that son of hers, and she doesn't want his father hanged for murder."

"He's a good lad too. I must say he took it very well."

"And young Gregory Trefusis is a fine boy. You heard how he came up to London all on his own to warn his stepfather?"

"They do say, sir, both Philip Burton and Sam Freeman are attractive chaps. Got a way with them. I know that Freeman had me fairly mazed. I could have sworn he was telling the truth, when he was lying like a trooper all the time."

"The most dangerous criminals are often charming," said Wilson. "I should say the matter with this Philip Burton was that he was born without any moral sense."

"Think he'll hang, sir, if we get him? We don't know exactly how it was done, even now."

"I think so, Blaikie, after that post-mortem this morning. When they found the old man had been drugged, as well as made drunk, that pretty well cleared up how it was managed. Lucky they were able to establish it, after so long. Of course, if the local police had had any sense, they'd have ordered a post-mortem right away. That'd have saved us a lot of trouble."

"How would you say it was done, sir? I meant the details. Of course I've got the general idea."

Wilson fell instinctively into his favourite attitude, with his long legs stretched out before him, and his hands together, with the tips of the outstretched fingers pressing on each other.

"Well, Blaikie," he said, "in the first place I suppose it's clear Captain Jay never left the house alive after he entered it for the first time."

Blaikie nodded. That, indeed, had been clear enough from the moment when the strong suspicion of murder arose.

"Very well then. This man Blakeway, or Burton, had the man put in the morning-room to wait. He then ordered the butler to bring in a bottle of rum. That alone proves he knew who his visitor was. You don't order rum for a casual stranger. But I think it also proves he hadn't then made up his mind to commit murder."

"Why, sir?"

"Because he would never have told the butler to get the rum. He'd have got it himself. Then he got Hatch and his wife out of the way. I think the idea of murder was probably in his mind already when he did that, though he may only have wanted to make sure of his talk with Jay not being overhead."

"I should say he meant to kill him by then," said Blaikie.

"Possibly. I'm not sure. Then, when the coast was clear, he went and fetched his visitor into the library.

I suppose we can take it as certain that Jay tried to blackmail him as the price of not giving away who he was. That's proved by what Jay said to Captain Pollen."

"I think that's clear, sir."

"Very well. We can't, of course, know what happened in their talk. But plainly Blakeway managed to make his visitor drunk, and to drug him too, with laudanum—of which, by the way, there was a good supply in the medicine cupboard at Sun House. The old man wouldn't notice it in the rum when he'd had a few more than were good for him already. As for the knock on the head, Blakeway may have given it to him to lay him out, or he may have fallen down and got it by accident when he became too drunk to stand."

"Yes, I can see that far, sir," said Blaikie. "But the medical evidence proves he wasn't killed for some hours after that—till the actual struggle on the landing upstairs, just before Fowler, or Freeman, telephoned for the police."

"I know. That was because Blakeway wanted to get away with the idea of the death being accidental, so as to be able to produce impeccable witnesses who had practically seen it happen."

"Damned clever, sir."

"It was. I think what did happen was this. Having got the old man dead drunk and mildly drugged, Blakeway carried him upstairs and locked him up in that cupboard where it was supposed he had been hiding. Then, or later, he made all that mess in his wife's room, to make it look like an attempted burglary, and faked that forced entry through the downstairs window with one of the chisels out of his own tool-box. Of course, he wore gloves while he was doing all that. And then, or perhaps before, it really makes no difference, he must have got into touch with Fowler, and arranged with him for the staging of the actual death."

" You see how it was worked, Blaikie. First, this Philip Blakeway goes upstairs nominally to find a book. He drags the unconscious Jay out of the cupboard and puts him ready where he's wanted. Then the other man—call him Fowler—comes up the stairs just at the right time, and, as soon as Fowler comes in sight, Blakeway shoots Jay dead—we know he was a crack shot—slips the revolver into the dead man's hand, whips off the gloves he's been wearing to avoid showing finger-prints of his own on the revolver, and there you have the two of them ready to swear Jay tried to kill Blakeway, and then killed himself by mistake while they were wrestling for possession of the gun. Of course, there wasn't any scuffle really. They merely arranged the dead body to look as natural as they could."

" It was smart of that Major Sayers, sir, to have spotted anything wrong about the way the gun was held."

" It was, Blaikie. And if there had been a first-class police officer on the job at that stage, I dare say there would have been a very different story to tell. But one can't really blame Whittall. It was all very cleverly managed, and if Mrs. Burton hadn't turned up unexpectedly from Canada, and begun asking inconvenient questions about her father, I've no doubt Blakeway would have got away with it. That was a bit of real bad luck for him."

" You speak as if you'd got a bit of sympathy for him, sir."

" I'm not sure I haven't, Blaikie. If I have, it's because of what that boy, Gregory Trefusis, said about him. He's pretty near heartbroken, and he simply won't believe Blakeway did anything wrong. . . . Besides, if I'm right, Jay was a blackmailer, and I never can get rid of a feeling that killing blackmailers isn't murder. More like justifiable homicide, don't you think ? "

"Dangerous feeling, sir,"

"All right, Blaikie. I won't act on it. In any case, no one's ever tried to blackmail me—yet. Perhaps that's an experience in store."

EPILOGUE

LOST WITH ALL HANDS

PORT OF SPAIN, TUESDAY.—It is feared that the British steamship, *Pride of England*, Captain Sergius Ankerström, has been lost in the gale which has raged for the past three days in the Caribbean Sea. *The Pride of England* was carrying a mixed cargo from London, and was expected to make her first call at San Domingo. Wreckage that has been picked up, including capsized boats, leaves no doubt that the vessel has been totally destroyed, and it is feared that every soul aboard must have perished.

"Well, that's that, sir," said Blaikie.

"I wonder," Wilson answered. "I've a feeling, somehow, that fellow Blakeway has nine lives."

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TWO old septuagenarian clubmen decide to have one more adventure before they die, and disappear into Devonshire to see whether they can beat Scotland Yard in elucidating a mystery—a little girl who went out to post a letter in Torquay has disappeared. The venerable sleuths do not realise that their own disappearance will eventually involve a second search for them. In the end, after various encounters with crooks, they prove victorious—and return to their club window with plenty of fresh reminiscences to inflict on their fellow members. Mr. Jefferson Farjeon's customary humorous touch is much in evidence in this entertaining story, but while he amuses, he also mystifies his readers.

MILES BURTON

Author of "Tragedy at the 13th Hole," "Fate at the Fair," etc.

DEATH AT THE CROSS ROADS

A COLLISION occurs at Five-Mile Cross, near Dormington, in the middle of a dark December night. Oscar Stalliford, the driver of one of the cars involved, is found dead, but there is no trace of the occupants of the second car, which belongs to a prominent citizen of Dormington, and has apparently been stolen from a parking place that evening. Stalliford's death brings to light his discreditable past, and it is found that several persons are relieved at his disappearance from the scene. Some days later Stalliford's son is shot under mysterious circumstances. Inspector Arnold is summoned to Dormington, and with the assistance of his friend, Desmond Merrion, is enabled to unravel the double mystery.

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Author of *Gallows Grange*, etc., etc.

THE SCARLET MESSENGER

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR SILVER stooped over something which lay still in a corridor on the second floor of the Bramcourt Hotel. It was the body of Lorimer Cranston. A knife had stabbed him clean as a whistle through the heart. Inspector Silver questions the dead man's ward, Auriel Maxwell, and learns that she has been the recipient of several threatening letters, each accompanied by a small scarlet bean. Two of the letters had reached her at Pinelands, her home in Surrey. The second of these messages was accompanied by the dead body of her dog, with a scarlet bean attached to its collar. Auriel had placed the matter in the hands of the local police, but without any result. Cranston had insisted that Auriel should go away, and she had gone on a visit to friends in France, leaving her destination unknown to all but a few of her immediate circle. Nevertheless a third mysterious warning had reached her there, and Cranston had brought her back to London, to the hotel where he himself now lay dead.

COLIN WARD

THE HOUSE PARTY MURDER

THIS is an extremely clever detective story, the first novel of a schoolmaster at a famous English public school. Most of the principal characters are introduced to us on board a liner *en route* for England. During the voyage one of the passengers mysteriously disappears. The main characters next foregather at a week-end house party where, following the theft of a pearl necklace and a queer game of planchette, one of the party is murdered. One of the most attractive features of this story is the extremely neat solution, which brings to a very satisfactory end a really brilliant story.

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JOHN FERGUSON

Author of *Death Comes to Perigord*, etc.

NIGHT IN GLENGYLE

ALEC MAITLAND returns from abroad down and out, till he meets a friend of his who happens to be an official in one of the chief Government offices and in need of a secret agent whose connection with the Ministry would not be suspected. Maitland accepts from him a commission to investigate certain strange happenings which threaten the safety of a British Crown Colony in Africa and to regain possession of certain papers which are found to be missing. Through an unfortunate incident arising out of his efforts to get on the track of these papers, he becomes the object of a hue and cry on the part of the police, who want him in connection with a sensational murder. His attempt to do his country an honourable service is made a great deal more difficult by having the minion of the law so close at his heels! A story of wits pitted against wits, of bloodshed, of hairbreadth escapes, of flight and pursuit, finishing with a piece of neat detection and a surprise both for the guileless Maitland and the reader.

ANTHONY GILBEY

Author of *Death in Fancy Dress*, *The Long Shadow*, etc.

THE MUSICAL COMEDY CRIME

MAJOR JOHN HILLIER, a well-known clubman, is found dead in his flat in Upper Poulton Terrace early one morning in rather peculiar circumstances. The discovery is made by a servant, upon whom a certain amount of suspicion falls. Inspector Field traces the dead man's movements on the previous night and learns that, after breaking up a dinner-party in a somewhat unconventional fashion, he travelled some distance to a remote suburban theatre to see a leading lady whom he cannot even identify by sight. Following up certain clues and deductions of his own, Field discovers the reason for this strange course of action, and tracing back the dead man's history over a number of years, finds himself entangled in a net of underworld intrigue in England and on the Continent. Dope, blackmail and a crime many years old all play their part in an affair that, starting without sensation, attracts universal attention. The component parts of the mystery are finally put together by Field and Scott Egerton, who, entering the case late in its development, is able to supply the final link.

